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Essays on
Robert Drake

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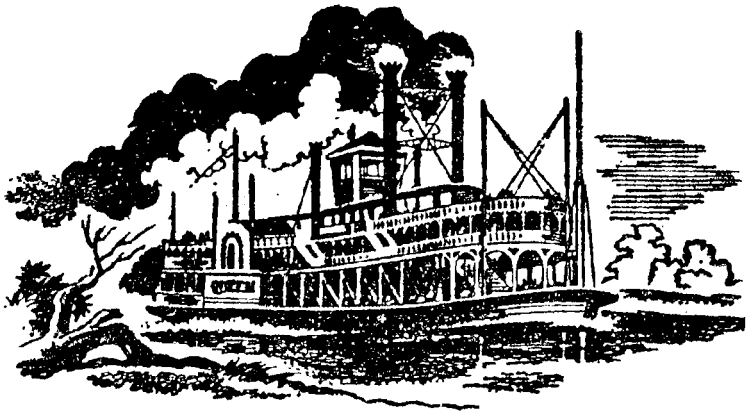

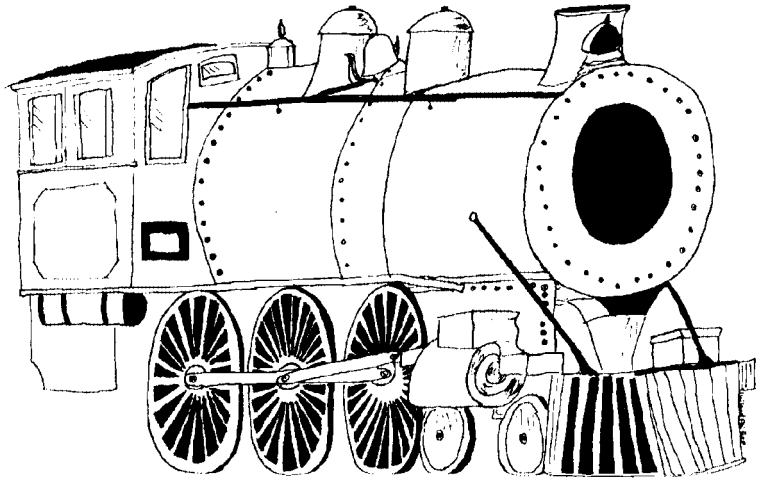

The following section prints papers that were first presented at a section on "Robert Drake: A Retrospective" at the November 1991 meeting of the South Atlantic Modern Language Association in Atlanta. The section was organized and chaired by Jeffrey J. Folks (Tennessee Wesleyan College). The papers have been revised and expanded for publication in the *Mississippi Quarterly*.

MISSISSIPPI QUARTERLY

SUMMER 1992 VOL. LXV

SPECIAL ISSUE

WILLIAM FAULKNER

GUEST EDITOR

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SOUTHERN CULTURES

A publication of the Center for the Study of the American South,
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A new journal that will examine cultural aspects of the United States South. This quarterly publication will include folk, popular, and high culture of the South, emphasizing both commonalities and conflict between dominant and alternative cultures in the South.

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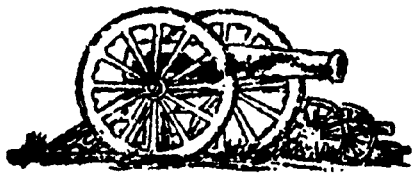

AUTHOR'S QUERY

For a continuing study of chaplains of the Civil War, North and South, I would appreciate hearing from anyone—including archivists, librarians, military historians and owners of personal collections—who has chronicles, journals, letters, diaries, books, essays, newspaper and magazine articles/columns by and/or about *Civil War Chaplains* from both North and South, land and sea. I am also intensifying my search for specific accounts and incidents of troop/battle involvement by chaplains of all faiths and denominations.

Dr. Glenn O. Carey, Professor Emeritus of English, Coates Box 172-3101, Eastern Kentucky University Richmond, Kentucky 40475

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Elmira College Center for Mark Twain Studies at Quarry Farm announces a call for papers "On the State of Mark Twain Studies" for a conference to be held August 12-14, 1993. Co-chaired by Professors Alan Gribben and Susan K. Harris, the conference will salute the life-time achievements of Louis J. Budd, who will be the keynote speaker, and celebrate the Center's tenth anniversary.

We invite papers on:

Mark Twain and Short Fiction
Mark Twain and Sexuality
Mark Twain and His Contemporaries
Mark Twain's "Home Circle"
Critical Approaches to Mark Twain
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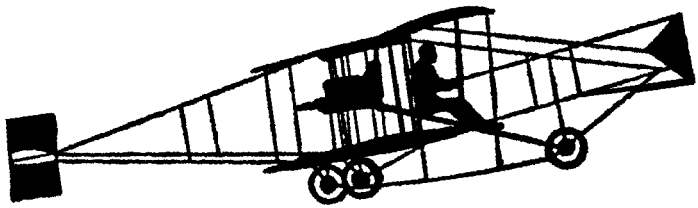
Research and Revision Opportunities

Ten-page papers suitable for a twenty-minute presentation should be submitted to Professor Darryl Baskin, Director, Center for Mark Twain Studies, Elmira College, Elmira, New York 14901 no later than February 1, 1993. Papers will be juried on a blind basis; any notes that might identify the author should be listed on a separate sheet.



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ROBERT DRAKE

University of Tennessee, Knoxville

My Own House of Fiction

HENRY JAMES HAS WRITTEN THAT THE house of fiction has not just one window but a million, and every writer looks at the "show," which I take to be life itself, through a different one. And what he sees there differs from what everyone else sees because he is different—in his own skin, I like to say, and no one else's. James goes on to say that there is, fortunately, no saying on what the writer's particular pair of eyes may *not* open. Put another way, this may suggest what Flannery O'Connor meant when she said that the writer can do anything in fiction he can get away with but nobody has ever gotten away with much. And, we might infer, the only valid censorship is the kind the writer imposes on himself because of who he is and what he is. Go ahead and see what you can get away with, Miss O'Connor might have told him; James himself says that art thrives on flying in the face of presumptions. No, it's not for the faint-hearted.

But dear me, what a tall order this can all be! Naturally, I think of my own self and my own work. First off, I had never even thought of trying to write fiction. I was educated, trained, prepared to teach English and American literature; and, since I planned to teach on the college level, I had gone through the whole Ph.D. process. If I wrote anything, I assumed it would be the usual scholarly and critical essays, maybe even a whole book—a study of some author or some "school" or tradition. But as for "creative" writing, I thought that was something way beyond me. But fate or whatever you want to call it disposed otherwise; and on the advice of a senior colleague at the end of my first year of teaching, I began trying to write short stories—all of course set in my part of the South—West Tennessee.

I've never been tempted to write a novel either, and some readers have observed that in my fiction very little happens. But that's all right with me: longer doesn't necessarily mean better. And for the kind of stories I write—short, succinct, and usually narrated in the first person, something like the *tale*, that length seems inevitable; and theme and form are one. And I don't worry much about it anymore. It's the

way I look at the world; it's my "thing." And I make no apology for that but remember the bold assertion of Hopkins' sonnet: "*Whát I dó is for me: for that I came.*" Every writer worth his salt has sooner or later to come round to that. And kind friends, condescending critics, and all the rest can go jump in the lake.

But Henry James of course speaks for the whole body of fiction, the whole house; and he puts the matter very well. Aspiring writers would do well to study his remarks carefully. But of course he's much too grand for most of us: we can think perhaps only of our own window, our own pair of eyes, our own skin. And it took me a good many years before I *could* come down to such brass tacks, making no apologies to anybody else and desiring not this man's art and that man's scope. What was my own limited house of fiction, what was my own pair of eyes, and would what they saw and the way they saw it be considered valid? Would I finally be *believed*—the crucial question for any writer? The greatest tale-teller on record is probably the Ancient Mariner, who held his audience, the Wedding Guest, with such a glittering eye that he could not choose but hear. I read the power of his glittering eye here not so much as some form of enchantment but as the compelling force which any teller of tales, if he's good enough, will exert over his audience: it's the force of authority, the conviction of truth. And it carries with it instant credibility. (Conversely, the inevitable—and most damning—response to the bad writer is always "I don't believe a word of it!")

So what was my own pair of eyes, what was the window in the house of fiction I looked through—and looked through so distinctively that perhaps I could make it my own? Over the years, as I wrote story after story, even published several books of them, I puzzled over the matter, looking for various influences in my family and childhood background, both hereditary and environmental. And of course there were some obvious things to be seen. I was the only child of older parents, born into my parents' middle age; I even remembered my paternal grandfather, a Virginian who had fought for the Confederacy, even been at Appomattox. I had grown up around some really gifted story-tellers too (my father and his four brothers particularly); and since I was so much younger than most of my cousins, there was often little for me to do, no one for me to play with at the family gatherings (*five* Christmas dinners for one thing, one at each brother's house!) and I became the fat little boy who wore braces on his teeth and took piano lessons who had to sit in the corner and listen to everybody else talk. Maybe that was the

beginning right there, being a listener, an observer, somewhat apart from the group. Perhaps all writers are that much out of step, even bystanders. But never, I may add, "innocent" bystanders: they're like big blotters, soaking it all up. And perhaps also they remember from time to time Henry James's advice to be one of those on whom nothing is lost.

It was a seamless garment, that world they talked about, the five brothers, not unlike Robert Penn Warren's "enormous spider web," which vibrates throughout when only a single filament is touched. And it hung together very well, composed as it was of close family and community ties, all of course rooted in Protestant Christianity, which gave all human relationships validity and significance. It was a world which was coherent, a world which made sense. And how blessed is any writer who can claim such an inheritance! Many writers today don't really have much to write about larger than themselves. And that's a sad affair—and often very dull too.

But again, what did I see from my own window in the house of fiction—writing tales, all of them quite short, all of them in some ways uneventful but nevertheless usually embodying revelations which could surprise, even startle, especially as coming out of what seemed a quiet world? Certainly, I've written about—and in the character of—big bold talkers in my time, usually cigar-chomping males, maybe even an occasional "good old boy." But I've also had my fair share of old-maid survivors, those who *remain* like Melville's Ishmael and are now left alone to tell the tale. And these are wise old girls: they remain and they remember and they've seen them come and they've seen them go. They've learned a lot too, quite often just sitting on the front porch rocking away. And if you *listen* to them—something our world quite often seems to have forgotten how to do—you may learn a whole lot. Some of it may surprise you, the knowledge of God and man they seem to have gleaned from their limited worlds; but then Jane Austen never left the shores of England. And good things have been known to come out of Nazareth.

And this brings me now to an old memory which surfaced some years ago—a stanza from a kind of nursery rhyme my father used to sing to me at bedtime:

I went down to my sweetheart's house,
I'd never been there before;
She put me in the old hog trough,
And I won't go there anymore!

And I suppose I know why it then came to light after so many years. At the time I was working on a story about a rather strange old woman, a lady who lived all alone but whose very aloneness made her somehow community property in her small town. And like Faulkner's Miss Emily Grierson—she who killed her lover to keep him from leaving her, then kept his body in an upstairs bedroom the rest of her life—she lived in a house that was all very suitably Southern and Gothic. But my heroine wasn't doing anything so bizarre, though she did catch a man late in the day, even married him briefly but "it didn't take," as people observed. So back she was now all alone in *her* big house. But she did have her credentials, her title as a formerly married lady now; so the rest of her life she just continued with "the mixture as before." She raised a pair of ducks in the house, calling them Brother and Sister; she continued driving all over the county visiting her former welfare "clients," all of whom she indiscriminately called "sweetie." And of course she went to all the funerals.

Eccentric? Peculiar (that wonderful Southern catch-all)? Certainly, all this and more. But by the same token a sort of "old reliable," a kind of "fixture" in the community and, I might add, respected, even beloved therein. No, she didn't butcher her lover/husband and put him in the deep freeze or even, in any way except metaphorically, in the old hog trough. But the makings were all there: she *could* have. But no, she settled for a less lurid solution: she had had her man and nobody could ever forget that, so now she could just go right on with her rat-killing, as my mother used to say—go right on with her life. And maybe that's the biggest surprise of all, the very "normality" of the thing. The quiet life goes on—but not without indicating what the possibilities might be. The lover has withdrawn and maybe the sweetheart didn't much want him anyway—or at least not for long. But she has proved her point. And it might still be fun to think of what could have been had she been less temperate. Who knows?

Maybe then what has always interested me, maybe even compelled me into fiction have been the possibilities, the might-have-been things, whether in life or in art, that have surprised both me and my charac-

ters: after all, it was the hog trough the sweetheart put her lover in, not the crepe myrtles. But then, unlike Miss Emily, she didn't play for keeps: she apparently did let him out. So perhaps my own house of fiction has been somewhat like the sweetheart's—a brief illumination but no cataclysm to be experienced there. But a whole world may be implicit in that quiet moment of revelation. Again in some ways it's like the traditional ballad or tale, though of course they can be quite lurid, even shocking. And in their seeming artlessness, the best ballads and tales often practice a strict, indeed ruthless economy and don't go in much for explanation and commentary. I think now that's what I see myself as having tried to do in my best stories. Sometimes the revelation the lover, even the reader experiences in the sweetheart's house is sly, even funny—occasionally wistful, in a few cases even sad beyond measure. But the world turns right on, the lover usually gets away, and the sweetheart proceeds apace with her rat-killing. This is about as close as I ever get to the sensational.

How much do my stories owe to "real life," even my own? It's hard for me to say; sometimes I'm not sure, indeed don't really want to know. And does it really matter? It's like Huckleberry Finn's preference in the culinary arts, which he makes known after disparaging "sivilized" cookery, where all the dishes are cooked separately: "in a barrel of odds and ends it is different," he says, "things get mixed up, and the juice kind of swaps around and things get better." If I *was* studiously, even slavishly trying to write up the home folks here, it would never be the version of them that the biographer, the historian would want to record, the "facts" as such, even less what these good people themselves would like to think. It would be what they had turned into in my head, what my imagination had been forced to do with and to them: fiction must always be more exigent, more tidy than real life. But I write what I know; I write out of the world I was born into and still inhabit (at least spiritually). I think that's finally all that matters and the only answer I can honestly give the source-hunters. Indeed, when I'm asked what was the origin (and who were the originals) of one of my stories, my reply is often simply "Don't ask me. I just wrote it." And that's not intended to be rude either. I simply have to leave such speculations for braver—and more innocent—minds than my own. Again, to quote Huck Finn, it's all "too various" for me.

LEWIS A. LAWSON

University of Maryland

The Whig Ethos in Robert Drake's Fiction

WOODVILLE, TENNESSEE, THE SITE of Robert Drake's fiction, is fifty miles north of Memphis, which place is either Heaven or Hell, depending on each Woodvillian's private response. It is the county seat of Barlow County. During the time that Drake's narrator dwelled there, from the 1930s to the 1950s, it was served by two railroads, the Illinois Central and the Louisville and Nashville. Although it is a town built on ridges, it is surrounded by a cotton-growing, therefore reasonably flat countryside.

History—particularly political history—is not often an announced subject in Woodville conversations, but it nevertheless dictates most of the core values to which the town subscribes. Woodville is proudly aware that it is in Tennessee, regularly thanking God that it is not in neighboring Mississippi or Arkansas, but at the same time also thanking Him that there are a Mississippi and an Arkansas, for otherwise Tennessee would be first or last—depending upon which ranking is undesirable—in every relevant statistic compiled by every statistically inclined agency in this great union. Being *in* Tennessee, Woodville is *of* Tennessee.

Now it may come as a great surprise to our Northern sistren and brethren to be told that Tennessee is not much like their conception of the South. For that matter, the entire South is not much like their conception of the South. I speak not merely of East Tennessee, whose two electoral districts have from the beginning of the Republican party been more loyal to its cause than have Vermont and New Hampshire. I speak of the entire state, which was not often a part of the Solid South when that phrase meant a South solidified by the stickum of the Democratic party. While the elder Robert Drake may have had portraits of Woodrow Wilson and William Jennings Bryan in the offices of his hardware store, if he was like many others, he may have been first of all drawn to those Democrats' core values, particularly their evangelical fervency, not to their specific political program.

After its understandable infatuation with Tennessean Andrew Jackson (who was distinctly unSouthern on some occasions), antebellum Tennessee stayed pretty close to the Whig party from 1836 through 1852, even preferring Kentuckian Henry Clay to Tennessean James K. Polk in 1844. It did vote Democratic in 1856, by a very narrow margin, probably because James Buchanan gave every indication that he would do absolutely nothing during his tenure. Tennessee reverted to its opposition to the Democrats in 1860, even in the year of crisis, when it—along with Kentucky and Virginia—voted for the Constitutional Union party, the remnants of the Whig party who could not bring themselves to move to one extreme or the other.

Now what does this tedious rehearsal of Tennessee politics reveal? It reveals, at least to me, that Tennessee, including Woodville, during its formative years adopted the core values of the Whig party. Further, it suggests to me that Tennessee would still adhere to those core values after the war, especially since they were not discredited by either the Southern defeat or the Northern victory. Those two phenomena did, of course, realign American politics to a rigid system of sectional extremes, one mass party or its opposition. The American people, even the historians, even the citizens of Woodville, Tennessee, forgot the Whigs. But the Whig spirit lives on, very obviously in Woodville, Tennessee, and very likely in much of the United States outside the circumferential highways of our major cities. For that reason, one of the chief appeals of Robert Drake's fiction is that it mirrors not one small Tennessee town but a widespread, probably majority experience that is flagrantly ignored or misrepresented by much of our popular media which pursue either a radical or a reactionary agenda, while professing support for the tired old twosome.

Early in his excellent study *The Political Culture of the American Whigs*[1], Daniel Walker Howe demonstrates that the Whig impulse originated in the religious fervor of the Second Great Awakening. This revivalistic phenomenon occurred among the "devotional" sects, as opposed to the "confessional" sects. Devotionalists believe that through personal activism one can structure his behavior and the behavior of others, while confessionalists "are more concerned to preserve their faith . . . in a world they have largely written off as irredeemable" (p. 163). Devotionalism characterizes many of the sects—Unitarian, New School Calvinist,

[1](Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979).

Free Will Baptist, and Methodist—that appealed to Americans of British descent—the English, the Welsh, the Scotch, and the Scotch-Irish, the latter of whom were most numerous in the settlement of Tennessee. Thus it should come as no surprise that—as James Justus points out in his very perceptive Foreword to the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition of *Amazing Grace*—Woodville shares a "dominant thread of evangelical Protestantism" with other old rural towns of the South.[2]

In Drake's fiction the narrator insists upon distinguishing the Methodism of his family from the other Protestant faiths in the town, adducing differences so minor that many people would fail to note them or recognize their significance. Perhaps this is one of those cases in which the shibboleths are accorded unwarranted prominence precisely because the underlying substantial difference is unknown or at least unacknowledged. Daniel Howe points out that while the Methodists were of the devotional party, they "concentrated more on individual than collective redemption" (p. 167). Thus the narrator's experience of religious activity is that of a private event without overt manifestations or sacerdotal efficacy.

In such a church, seated between mother and father, and surrounded by extended family, the narrator of the Woodville world may be pardoned for telescoping religion and family feeling, so that each is but an aspect of the same existential experience, a healthy dependence upon the paternal figure that is beautifully described in the story "Amazing Grace" "when, all of a sudden, Daddy put his arm around me and whispered, 'Son, you just don't know how much Daddy loves you.' And then, right there, in front of all those people, I just reached up and hugged him around the neck" (p. 47). For the narrator both religion and family have the same institutional core values, the values of Whiggery, if Thomas Brown has identified them correctly in his recent study of the American Whigs, *Politics and Statesmanship*[3]. At the heart of the Whig philosophy, he says, were a sense of moderation, a desire for self-restraint, a belief in the power of "rational persuasion, and a positive passion for the public good" (pp. 11-12).

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[2]James Justus, Foreword, *Amazing Grace*, by Robert Drake, Twenty-Fifth Anniversary Edition (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1990), p. viii.
[3](New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

While Brown proceeds from the personal to the public in his discussion of core values, I shall reverse the flow in my discussion, in effect go from present to past. If we abstract life we can delude ourselves into thinking that a human being can begin at the beginning; if we live life, however, we know that a human being makes what order he can by recollecting his life. We first of all discover ourselves to be living public lives, engaged in a multitude of human interactions. Now the Whig and the Woodvillian accept public life as a highly positive good—both have an unshakable faith in republicanism, that is, humanity civilized by traditional institutions, but not necessarily the same commitment to democracy, a world of *most sinister implications* for Miss Fanny Hamilton.[4] Thus when the narrator tells us that Evelyn Henning "believed in *society* (sometimes with a capital 's,' sometimes not)" it is important that we hear the qualification that follows: "just as she believed in any other reasonable organism or machine and she wasn't about to tamper with its workings" (*Survivors*, p. 100). Similarly, the hundred-year-old narrator of "I Never Have Been a Well Woman," the very voice of the past, speaks warmly of *folks* (*Survivors*, p. 113), but it must be understood that folks are of some value only if they fight their innate imperfection by developing a sense of duty. The narrator's mother makes the same proviso in her celebration of *folks*, in "Up on the Corner" (*Survivors*, p. 123).

Thus public life is good and useful if it is institutionalized. This means, primarily, that four institutions must be strongly supported: the family, the church, the school system, and the legal system. These institutions form the individual: thus we must take time in our public life to discover how we were formed. Daniel Howe speaks of the Whigs as the party of memory, and certainly the basic strategy of Robert Drake's Whig-Woodville narrative is to investigate memory: predominantly a talking narrator remembers other talking narrators, each sifting his pan of experience to find the few gold flakes of useable past. In "The Birthday Picture" Drake offers a beautiful simile for his artistic intention: just as the dipsomaniacal photographer Mr. Fields wants to capture every child's image without a blur—"but a little girl in the front row looked behind her just at that moment" (*Survivors*, p. 7), so Drake knows that there will be blurs on his plate of memory. Still, it is every human's duty, especially every artist's duty, to fix as much as possible in its ordered place, for without narrative, the recollected life, we cannot survive.

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[4]Robert Drake, *Survivors and Others* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987), p. 150.

In recollection we come to understand how institutions formed us. We come to understand that church and school, especially, offer not merely their specialist training but also the general building of individual character. The role of these institutions grows as the individual ages, of course, but the distinction between family and one of these public institutions is never absolute and often unclear, so that Drake's narrator wisely treats those crises when one formative sphere encroaches upon another. In "The Fountain Filled with Blood" (*AG*) the transition from family to church for the fulfillment of one aspect of character development is aborted because the narrator's understanding of the religious institution is suddenly confused. The narrator's mother recognizes the confusion that has occurred because of the meddling of the dogmatic Campbellite woman and tries to restore simplicity to the concept, but the ritual of baptism—marking a very special kind of transition, from physical childhood to spiritual childhood—has been flawed, perhaps fatally, for at the end of the story the spring rain offers no hint of refreshment. In "Good Morning, Merry Sunshine," on the other hand, a very successful progression from family to school occurs. On a certain day in the first grade, the narrator becomes aware of the reality of corporal punishment and decides that his major concerns are at home. Running out of school, however, he begins to think of his mother's belief in the sacredness of "*fulfilling your obligations*" (*AG*, p. 19), the Whig value of self-restraint, and so the narrator returns to school, having discovered that—as General Lee so eloquently put it—"Duty is the noblest word in the English language."

The legal system is not much in evidence in Robert Drake's Woodville, even though the town encloses the county courthouse. This doesn't mean that Woodville was without law. On the contrary, it means that Drake's narrator, from his vantage point within a strong, law-abiding family, dedicated to the support of the church and the school and the civic code for which they stand, would not have often been in the sphere of town life in which the police and court system would have been active. It also probably means that there was no carnival of crime occurring in Barlow County, where Whig views prevail. Kenneth Lynn has argued that the overwhelming presence of illegality and its institutional consequences in the stories of Augustus Baldwin Longstreet, Johnson Jones Hooper, and George Washington Harris results from the efforts of Whig writers to describe what society is like when the

Democrats become too rampant[5]. It should be possible, then, to argue the reverse: the absence of such sordidness in Drake's stories reveals a Whig writer revealing a world in which Ransy Sniffle, Simon Suggs, and Sut Lovingood—probably victims of their own promiscuousness—died without issue. Indeed, there doesn't seem to be even one Snopes in the Woodville telephone book, whereas they are still very numerous in my home county of Sullivan, at the other end of the state, I regret to say.

We are arrived, then, from the public institutions back to the family, in which the most important character molding takes place. We must begin with the fact that imperfection is the nature of the beast. This imperfection, though never openly admitted as such, is Original Sin. That it *is* Original Sin is apparent by the fact that there is often the implication that the human being is inherently irrational and undisciplined when driven by the sexual urge. The narrator of "A Cool Day in August" says that such a realization must be repressed as much as possible: "money was not something you *talked* about, any more than you did your body and its less-public functions. And I realized, more and more, that that was just the way they were. The world was full of unavoidable realities, some of them less pleasant than others; and if you had any sense, you could see them and you knew they were there. But you just didn't say much about them" (*Survivors*, p. 39). In this culture devoted to *talk*, certain things are not talked about: notice the vagueness of the language here even as the narrator talks about what he is not going to talk about. The injunction not to talk about sex is not always obeyed, though: there occurs in many of the stories an aged woman, "Auntee," who says of men that "when all was said and done, there wasn't one of them who was a gentleman below the waistband of his pants" (*Survivors*, p. 33). On another occasion, on the same point she is a little more voluble: "men are *weak*; and if it weren't for women upholding the morals of the community, there just wouldn't be any! And that's why people expect a woman to keep her skirts down" (*Survivors*, p. 104). Perhaps that's why it is a female voice that is heard throughout the Woodville stories warning of the dangers of growing up "spoiled rotten." If one doesn't learn restraint in childhood, then one remains an unrestrained child all of one's life. See the story "Easy Steps for Little Feet" (*AG*).

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[5]*Mark Twain and Southwest Humor* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1960).

Such restraint is, of course, the bare necessity for civilized community life, and one doesn't have to be a Whig to wish for such a state. Certainly Robert Drake celebrates decency and responsibility as positive values in a fashion that is rare in our egoistical contemporary world. But Robert Drake is not a *fool* about restraint, for he knows that too much adherence to communal restraint inevitably demands sacrifices of individuality. I want to close by citing three stories in which Robert Drake's vision ultimately possesses the tragic dimension precisely because it recognizes communal coercion.

I offer you the story "Were You There" (*Survivors*), in which a family is so ashamed at the outbursts of a retarded child that it has her lobotomized. Her subsequent tranquility is the talk of the town: "They said she never cried at all now, didn't seem to let anything bother her one way of the other and, as my mother would have joked about anybody who didn't sweat *anything*, was just as happy as if she had good sense. In any case, everybody in town said it was simply a miracle, and nobody was afraid to be around her at all anymore" (p. 74). That thrilling understatement is a perfect complement to the title, "Were You There," which refers to another crucifixion for the peace of the community.

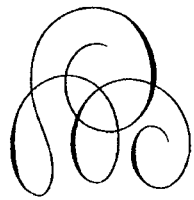
I offer you the story "Mr. Andrew and the Big Cedar Tree" (*AG*). Mr. Andrew Fowler, when he was about fifty, had trouble below the waistband of the pants, ran off from his wife and grown children, to live with Florene Hughes. When he died, he left everything to his wife and children, with the stipulation that there be no funeral and that he be buried under the cedar tree in the yard where he and Florene had lived. But the family, supported by the Methodists, feels that it has been shamed enough, so the corpse has to participate in a big funeral at the Methodist church before being buried under the cedar tree. After a week, the terms of the will having been fulfilled, "they took him up and buried him in the Fowlers' lot at Oakwood Cemetery" (p. 96).

Finally, I offer you the story of "Mr. Marcus and the Overhead Bridge" (*AG*). Mr. Marcus Bascomb had had advantages that not many Woodvillians had had or would even want. He went to Harvard, then even to Oxford, staying in Britain to serve with great distinction in World War I. Thereafter his life was a mystery to Woodville, for he only returned for an occasional short visit. The town speculates that he "had married a wife of the wrong sort over in France during the war and

was ashamed to bring her home" (pp. 106-107); but Cousin Rosa Moss asserts that Marcus's secret wound is that he had always been afraid to "let himself get mixed up in anything enough to love some particular person or some particular place" and that when he has run out of places to run to, "he'll come right back here to Woodville for good" (p. 107).

Cousin Rosa Moss is right, though she has no more knowledge of Marcus's motives than we ever do. Come back finally he does, at night, to commit suicide by jumping off the overhead bridge that spans the ravine that runs through Woodville. We can only speculate that Marcus had internalized those Whig core values only too well, but that instead of lifting him up, they bear him down, as they had the other suicides who had leapt into that pit. Why else must the act of submission be at home?

I began by saying that Memphis is either Heaven or Hell, depending upon a Woodvillian's personal inclination. In this story, despite the pain that it must have cost him, Woodvillian Robert Drake had to say that Woodville is no different from Memphis.



JAMES A. PERKINS

Westminster College, Pennsylvania

A Sort of Central Fact About Woodville: The Railroad as Metaphor in the Works of Robert Drake

A RAILROAD TRACK RUNS THROUGH THE center of Woodville, the fictional town Robert Drake has chronicled in four collections of short stories beginning with *Amazing Grace* in 1965. The railroad which Drake identified as the L&N in *Amazing Grace* is based on the Illinois Central, which cut through Drake's hometown of Ripley, Tennessee.

As Drake recalled in "The New Bridge: *Cui Bono?*":

> Everything around us there, you know, revolved around a north-south axis. Situated on the main line of the Illinois Central Railroad—back in the days of passenger travel—and U.S. Highway 51—the principal Great Lakes to Gulf artery, we could go to Chicago or New Orleans without batting an eye. But God help you if you wanted to go to Arkansas and Missouri to say nothing of points farther west. Indeed, it has always been well nigh impossible to get to Nashville or Knoxville by public means at least. But then, as I have been saying for some time, West Tennessee is, in many ways, an extension of northern Mississippi.[1]

In his subsequent books, Drake identified the railroad by its proper name, the Illinois Central. But the name of the railroad is not important. *The City of New Orleans* still runs between Chicago and New Orleans but you have to call Amtrak to get a ticket. What is important is the idea of the railroad, the metaphor of railroad, the possibilities that "railroad" offers Woodville.

The railroad which runs through Woodville is unusual in Drake's work because it is one of the few physical objects he ever describes. As

[1]Robert Drake, "The New Bridge: *Cui Bono?*" *UT Daily Beacon*, January 14, 1977, p. 2.

Patsy G. Hammontree pointed out through the title of her 1988 article "Comic Monologue: Robert Drake's Community of Voices," in Robert Drake's stories the ear dominates the eye.[2]

In an interview published in the *Mississippi Quarterly*, Drake told Jeffrey Folks:

> I don't *see* my stories, I *hear* my stories, more than anything. Somebody told me he couldn't imagine how my characters look, and I said, "If you'll just listen to them, you'll know."[3]

Folks followed up with the question, "Do you see Woodville visually at all?" and Drake responded, "Well, yes. But not enough to make you see it. I think of it in my mind's eye, but I don't ever describe it" (p. 226).

There are two major exceptions to this pattern of aural dominance in Robert Drake's fiction, two things that are visually described. The first is the Drake Brothers store found in "The Store," which was a late addition to *Amazing Grace* and which Drake says is "of course not fiction but absolutely fact: a memoir of Drake Brothers, the hardware and grocery store owned and operated by my father and my uncle, a very real institution in Ripley, Tennessee, and, along with this town and the Methodist Church, the beginning of everything there is to know about me and my world".[4] "The Store," an avowed piece of non-fiction, actually serves best as an introduction to *The Home Place: A Memory and a Celebration*, in the prologue of which Drake says, "This is the book I was perhaps born to write though I probably could not have written it until now."[5] The second exception is the railroad, which is visually a strong enough element in Drake's work to have been used in the cover design for *Survivors and Others*.

The description of the railroad is not as compact or composed as the description of the store. The store is part and parcel of home. It is presented at the beginning of *Amazing Grace* as the place out of which the rest of Woodville grows. The railroad stretches out through story after story. It rumbles and shakes in our consciousness; it goes "tick tick"

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[2]*Kennesaw Review*, 1 (Spring 1988), 67-68.
[3]Jeffrey Folks, "An Interview with Robert Drake," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 43 (Spring 1990), 226.
[4]Robert Drake, *Amazing Grace: Twenty-fifth Anniversary Edition* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1990), p xiii.
[5]Robert Drake, *The Home Place: A Memory and a Celebration* (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1980), p. vii.

as the summer's heat expands the rails. It is seen through the passage of time. In the story "Under the Bluff" the narrator recalls:

> But some of the older folks remembered when there was a regular passenger service, and you could get a boat at Boyd's landing and go down to Memphis or up to St. Louis or most anywhere in the world, especially when the roads were so mixed up in the winter that you couldn't get out of town to catch a train.[6]

In "On the Side Porch" the narrator gives us a glimpse of the heyday of train travel while telling us about Evelyn Henning of Barfield.

> I had heard of her all my life, nearly, but usually as a rather exotic bird of passage: people down at Barfield (I lived six miles away in Woodville, the county seat) often didn't know what to make of her. Because without batting an eye, she came back there from what they could only assume was a glamorous life in Chicago and seemed perfectly content to exist in a town so small that people were still going down to the drugstore to have a Coca-Cola every morning at ten o'clock—and meet all their friends there—and, later on, watch the two I.C. streamliners meet (on the double track) in mid-afternoon because Barfield was just about halfway between Chicago and New Orleans.[7]

By the time we hear from Miss Sara in "The Fifth Wheel," the railroad has fallen on hard times:

> I reckon the Greyhound bus still knows we're on the map, but I don't think there's a single good train that stops here any more. About all *they* do now anyway is just haul niggers back and forth from Mississippi to Chicago.[8]

Some of the place names around Woodville, Fisher's Crossing and Haley's Switch, are names connected with the railroad, and the railroad provides the locale for all sorts of drama in Woodville, from the romance of the newlyweds, Sally Currie and Marcus Winslow in "A Cool Day in August" taking "the night train for Chicago" (*Survivors*, p. 35), to the horror of suicides who jumped from the overhead bridge,[9] to the scandal of the woman "who said she was a nurse" and who filed a breach of promise suit against a local doctor because in returning from a medical convention in Chicago she "left the day coach where she had been

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[6]Robert Drake, "Under the Bluff," in *The Burning Bush* (Nashville: Aurora Publishers, Inc., 1975), p. 36.
[7]Robert Drake, "On the Side Porch," in *Survivors and Others* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987), p. 99.
[8]Robert Drake, "The Fifth Wheel," in *The Single Heart* (Nashville: Aurora Publishers, Inc., 1971), p. 120.
[9]Robert Drake, *Amazing Grace* (Philadelphia: Chilton Co., 1965), p. 142,

riding and moved into the Pullman with him *because she thought she deserved it*" (*Survivors*, p. 159), to the humor of Mr. Howard, the drunkard, as reported in "Mrs. Picture Show Green":

> Why one time, Mrs. Green said she herself got up to take the early morning train for Memphis. When it came in, who should get off but Mr. Howard, who told her he had been coming out from Memphis on the late train the night before but had slept through Woodville, and the next thing he knew, he was up in Fulton, Kentucky, and had to wait there for the early morning local to come back down! (*Survivors*, p. 52)

The railroad then, like the overhead bridge it made necessary, "was sort of central fact about Woodville" (*Amazing Grace*, p. 142):

> People used to say that Woodville wasn't anything but ridges and ravines, and in the old days the railroad had evidently been put through to make the most use of the ravines. It ran right through the town between the ridges in a deep cut, and the only way you ever saw the track was to look down whenever you were crossing the overhead bridge. (*Amazing Grace*, p. 142)

The railroad did not mark a sociological division in Woodville. There were well-to-do folks as well as riff-raff on both sides of the cut.[10]

> Cousin Rosa and Cousin Emma Moss were Mamma's two old-maid cousins who lived up on the corner by the railroad bridge. When we sat on their porch in the summertime, you could hardly talk, the trains made so much noise chugging through the cut. Mamma didn't like having to talk between trains; but they were used to it and would always laugh and say, "There are always more trains when Lucille comes." (*Amazing Grace*, p. 48)

Although Cousin Rosa loved the railroad and wanted "a ticket as long as your arm" (*Survivors*, p. 60), Cousin Emma "hated living up on the corner by the railroad bridge . . ." (*Survivors*, p. 57).

In addition to his mother's cousins, "Uncle Urshel and Aunt Suzanne lived right on the railroad cut . . ." (*Amazing Grace*, p. 26).

> Uncle Urshel and Aunt Suzanne had a daughter named Lady Jane that taught in the colored grammar school and a son named Booker T. that lived over in North Carolina. (*Amazing Grace*, p. 26)

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[10]Telephone interview, February 18, 1991.

In the summer when Booker T. came back to Woodville to visit his parents, the narrator would play with Booker T.'s daughter Alice Ann:

> . . . Alice Ann and I would sit out on the back porch eating ripe tomatoes that Aunt Suzanne kept in the icebox until they were real cold and watch the trains go by. (*Amazing Grace*, p. 26)

Robert Drake watched trains as a child. He even secretly hoped to become an engineer (telephone interview). "Ever since I was a small boy growing up in West Tennessee on the 'Main Line of Mid-America,' as the Illinois Central Railroad likes to call itself, trains and all that pertains to them have been one of the great facts of my life."[11] He watched trains and he dreamed:

> I was forever the young boy watching the Illinois Central mainline trains pounding grandly through our town (few of them actually stopped there) and resolving that someday it would be me on board, a spectator no longer but a real-live actor and, of course, the star of the show. (*Survivors*, p. 60)

The narrator's parents were divided on the value of travel. His mother said, "I've got more to worry about right here in Woodville than I can attend to . . . and I haven't got time to go running around the world to see what other folks are up to" (*Survivors*, p. 60). His father, on the other hand, had travelled on business to St. Louis, New York, and "once even to New Haven Connecticut—for a Winchester Repeating Arms convention of some sort" (*Survivors*, p. 60) and was glad that he had done it and would not ever need to do it again.

The character Robert in "By Thy Good Pleasure" finds himself thinking about trains at the burial of his father in the Oakwood Cemetery in Woodville:

> Oakwood was down by the canning factory, and the railroad ran right along one side of it. And as we got out of the car, a long freight train zoomed by behind a triple diesel unit. And then all of a sudden right there while Brother Parks was pronouncing the benediction, I began to think about how I had always liked trains, ever since I was little, and how Daddy used to take me down to the station every Sunday between Sunday School and church so I could see the eleven o'clock passenger train from Memphis come by. Now there weren't any big old black steam engines chugging through anymore; there were just diesels, throbbing powerfully in a cool, restrained sort of way. It was strange that that was what I should be thinking about right there when we were burying Daddy. (*Amazing Grace*, pp. 152-153)

[11]Robert Drake, "The Trains in My Life," *Phoenix*, Fall 1973, p. 23.

In "The Trains in My Life" Robert Drake asked rhetorically, "But why this fascination with trains, with noise, even dirt?" (p. 23) and then answered as follows:

> I think now it all ultimately had something to do with the track, the rails—those gleaming streaks, so disproportionately small compared to the weight they bore, yet so ultimately and fundamentally important in directing, guiding, and controlling all that sound, all that energy. The rails too were the great connectors, which joined my small hometown to Memphis and Chicago and New Orleans and finally all the big wide world, Great Lakes to Gulf, sea to shining sea. (p. 23)

Later in the same essay, Drake says:

> We've got to "connect," as E. M. Forster commanded; and surely that is one of the things travel is all about—discovering the likeness in the dissimilar, the resemblances among the disparate. But sometimes I think it's only when we appreciate these differences, whether between peoples or countries, whatever, that we can really comprehend their essential and very real similarities. And that's why travel is broadening. (p. 24)

A closer look at three of Drake's characters and at their responses to travel may bring this discussion of the railroad as metaphor into sharper focus. The three characters are Marcus Bascomb from "Mr. Marcus and the Overhead Bridge," Cousin Rosa Moss from "A Ticket as Long as Your Arm," and the narrator in "The Tower and the Pear Tree."

Certainly Mr. Marcus Bascomb is an accomplished traveler. After graduation from Harvard and additional study at Oxford, Mr. Marcus fought with the British in France in World War I. After the war, he remained in Paris "where he knew a lot of writers and artists" (*Amazing Grace*, p. 144). Mr. Marcus liked to travel: "And now you heard he was in Spain or Italy or somewhere else over there" (*Amazing Grace*, p. 144).

To the young narrator "Mr. Marcus was the most 'romantic' figure that ever was—certainly around Woodville: a sort of cross between Rupert Brooke and Robinson's Richard Cory, who 'glittered when he walked' " (*Amazing Grace*, p. 144). Since there is no suspense or foreshadowing in this story (it opens with a statement about the suicide of Marcus Bascomb) the choice of allusions here must serve other purposes. Rupert Brooke has become the standard coin for the loss of the young and talented. He and his fellow World War I poets have replaced Keats in the modern imagination as symbols of unrealized potential. Richard

Cory on the other hand suggests always the public's bafflement at the suicide of a man who has everything.

Of course, not everyone believes that Marcus Bascomb had everything. Cousin Rosa Moss, who taught him "in the first grade and in the Baptist Sunday School" and who thought "the Bascombs were always a curious lot," believes that he had never been really happy:

> ". . . I think that, for some reason, Marcus has always been afraid to let himself get mixed up in anything enough to love some particular person or some particular place, and you certainly do have to let yourself get mixed up in things when you do that. And that's why I think he keeps wandering around from one place to another so much." (*Amazing Grace*, p. 145)

Although he came back to Woodville once in a while, Mr. Marcus never stayed long. Cousin Rosa Moss, however, knew that he would be back:

> "But finally, he's bound to run out of places to go, and then I think he'll come back here to Woodville for good. Anybody that was born and raised in Woodville is mixed up in it forever whether he likes it or not. One thing's certain: Woodville will be right here waiting for him when he does get ready to come back." (*Amazing Grace*, pp. 145-146)

Cousin Rosa Moss was right. Mr. Marcus came back, but he didn't have a home place, a sense of belonging. It is difficult to read Cousin Rosa Moss's prediction without hearing Robert Frost's lines from "The Death of the Hired Man": "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in."[12] When Mr. Marcus ran out of places to go, Woodville and the overhead bridge were right there waiting for him.

In "A Ticket as Long as Your Arm" Cousin Rosa Moss, who "taught the first grade for nearly fifty years—three generations in some families—and few people there could imagine learning to read or write from anybody else" (*Survivors*, p. 61) loved to travel: "Cousin Rosa was big and bold, liked to venture out, go places, the farther away the better, and then come home and tell it all" (*Survivors*, p. 64). She felt that travel cut you down to size and made you see that there are other people and places on this earth.

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[12]*Complete Poems of Robert Frost* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 53.

Cousin Emma, who, according to Cousin Rosa, "just wanted to be right in the middle of everything in town" (*Survivors*, p. 57) thought "travel was fine, in small doses; but she didn't believe in building your whole life around it, and the best part of a trip was always getting back home" (*Survivors*, pp. 64-65).

While the Moss girls disagreed about travel—with Rosa, who "thought riding a Pullman was the next thing to heaven" (*Survivors*, p. 63), wishing for "a ticket as long as your arm," and Emma, who preferred to travel by bus (*Survivors*, p. 64), stating that "anybody that had been born and raised in Woodville, Tennessee knew enough about human devilment to last him the rest of his life" (*Survivors*, p. 65), they never really left Woodville: they might venture off somewhere to see something, but their roots remained in Woodville. Woodville was home. They were mixed up enough in it to love it as a particular place.

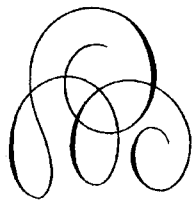
The narrator in "The Tower and the Pear Tree," the last story in *The Single Heart*, has settled in Chicago "in the Middle West—perhaps the most alien of all regions to the Southerner" (*The Single Heart*, p. 166). Each spring he boards the Illinois Central in Chicago to go home to Tennessee. And that train takes him home immediately. "This is the railroad above all others which has a distinctively Southern air with its brown and yellow and orange streamliners streaking back and forth between the Great Lakes and the Gulf over what it calls the 'main line of mid-America'" (*The Single Heart*, p. 167).

Although the narrator has found Chicago bustling, stimulating, energetic, driven, and healthy, he has also found it cold and uncaring, and he looks forward with increasing delight to his annual encounter with "an ancient pear tree which stood in the backyard of a modest house near the station" (*The Single Heart*, p. 169) in Fulton, Kentucky, the last stop before home.

> Every year, I watched for the pear tree, sorry when spring was late and there were no blooms, rejoicing when I caught it in flower and comparing its performance then with that of previous years. Usually, some more limbs had died; but miraculously, there were always some new shoots sprouting from the old trunk, whose essential vitality never seemed to fail. And I would give thanks—I knew not why then—that it was still there, alternately blackening and silvering as the spring winds tossed it in the sun. (*The Single Heart*, p. 170)

By the time the narrator tells the tale of The Tower and the Pear Tree he knows why he gave thanks that the pear tree was still there. "There was nothing of the tower about this tree" (*The Single Heart*, p. 169). This lone tree taking strength from its roots stood against the ravishes of age and weather to bring forth each spring what beauty it could manage to welcome the narrator to that particular place he had let himself get mixed up with, The Home Place, Woodville.

In her essay "Place in Fiction," which Robert Drake has assigned to his classes for a quarter of a century, Eudora Welty says: "Every story would be another story and unrecognizable as art if it took up its characters and plot and happened somewhere else."[13] When A.B. Crowder asked Robert Drake, "How do you think you'd be different as a writer if you were from Vermont or Michigan"[14] Drake responded with the question: "How could I answer a question like that?" Fortunately he doesn't have to. Robert Drake was born in Ripley, Tennessee, on October 20, 1930, and for twenty-five years he has been celebrating the particularness of that place through short stories about his fictional Woodville, a small town with a railroad track running right through it.



[13]*South Atlantic Quarterly*, 55 (January 1956), 62.
[14]Ashby Bland Crowder, ed. "Robert Drake," *Writing in the Southern Tradition: Interviews with Five Contemporary Authors* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), p. 121.

DOUGLAS PASCHALL

Montgomery Bell Academy, Nashville, Tennessee

Telling and Reckoning: A Recuperation of the Drake Stories

WE WHO HAVE THE HAPPY FORTUNE TO know Robert Drake—who have heard a portion of his great hoard of stories and "sayings" in his own inimitable voice and idiom and cadence—find it altogether too easy to " tune in to" the voices of his fictional narrators on the same "frequency" we use for his own conversational talk. Right or wrong, and whether as readers of the Drake stories it helps us or hobbles us, we cannot avoid it. Such a difficulty is considerably intensified, moreover, if as a reader you have grown up more or less in the same neck of the woods as the writer, and is made more difficult still if the essential elements of your upbringing were essentially the same as his. In those respects, I am multiply disabled: I know Robert Drake's familiar speaking voice from a modest and limited personal acquaintance, but it is also true to say that I have known at least an intimation of that voice from as far back as I can remember, and in that sense "recognized" it, and felt it resonating in the echo chamber of my own psyche, almost before I could register some "local habitation and a name" for it to belong to.

However, with the difficulties granted, I have adopted as my provisional discipline an attempt to listen afresh to the Drake stories strictly in terms of how they sound from what appears on the page, and have tried to approach an understanding of them as if I were a version of that elusive creature, the "common" reader—not so much professorial and scholarly, then, as someone interested, attentive, and eager to keep turning the pages. I have hoped by such a discipline to arrive at some reasonable notion of what the stories are *made of* and likewise what to *make of* them.

My down-to-earth way of putting it would be that Robert Drake's stories are conspicuously made out of varieties of "telling" and "reckoning"—that complex of reflection and surmise, of gossip and anecdote, of raw incident and settled judgment, that makes up the colloqui-

al folk-speech of an extended family, or what we may call the "tribe." But "tell" is one of those fine English words that drive foreign speakers crazy (especially if they are Cartesian and Francophone) because such words move within overlapping and conflated meanings: meanings which happen, in respect to this word, to be important to the way these particular stories move, and, yes, "tell"—both while they are being read and afterwards, in recuperation.

The denotations of "tell," of course, turning to bald definitions, include, among others, to narrate or recount, as in "tell a story"; to notify or bring news, as in "Tell us! Tell us!"; to discern or identify, as in "tell one thing from another" or "It's very hard to tell"; to command or rebuke, as in "You tell her to" or "I'll tell him off"; to count or sum up, as in "telling the cost"; and, not finally but quickly to end this particular list, to have a marked effect or impact on, as in make a thing "tell" by force of revelation or power.

"Reckoning" belongs in the same general context, and has largely the same everyday colloquial flavor and punch. If I "reckon" that Drake's stories are about folks "telling" and being "told," then, by a process of summing up and finding direction, I am trying my best to get it right, the same way good pilots "reckon" their true way home. Just as the phrase "dead reckoning" implies an inerrancy of instinct, computation, trailblazing, so the phrase "a final reckoning" suggests that some sizable books are about to be balanced and closed. So it is. And so they are.

The Drake stories, I now notice as formerly I had not, ring changes on the word "tell" or "told" that cover the full range of meanings noted above. At the end of "The Moss Girls," Sally Grigsby, soprano in the makeshift quartet that has sung for a funeral at Mt. Moriah, notes that "cemetery" in the overhead sign is spelled wrong and asks, "Wonder how that happened?" The narrator instantly continues, "And then I spoke up and said, '*I can tell you all about it*'."[1] Mrs. Edney, the high-school English teacher, has recommended Henry James for "seeing both sides until it was hard to make up your mind what was really right": "I know I tried to read him," the narrator adds, "but it just didn't seem to me he was worth the effort. After a while, you sort of got tired of all the sides old Henry was always seeing; you just wanted him to come out

[1]Robert Drake, *Amazing Grace*, Twenty-fifth Anniversary Edition (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1990), p. 41.

and tell something (*AG*, p. 76). And it was Mrs. Edney who was "*always telling us about something that happened* out there [at Louisa, where she had come from], a long time ago" (*AG*, p. 74).

The following paragraph, from near the end of "Brother Haynes and the Nine-Year-Old Evangelist," read so as to underscore *tell* and *told*, may remind us how typical and characteristic such passages are in the stories:

> The next morning I told Mamma and Daddy all about Ruby Nell and Brother Haynes and everything. Mamma acted like she just wasn't going to *let* herself say anything, but Daddy must have thought I was trying to make fun of them because he got off all over again on having too much education and getting above your raising and acting a fool. A few days later he told us that Uncle John, the Methodist preacher, had been down to hear Ruby Nell and thought she was right smart. But he didn't look at Mamma when he was telling us about it. Mamma just sort of pulled in the corners of her mouth and *looked* at me, but she didn't say a word. (*AG*, pp. 90-91)

In the piece entitled "Survivors" that introduces *Survivors and Others*[2], Drake distinguishes a quality of willed and triumphant endurance from any merely stubborn or reflexive hanging on past your expected time: "It has to do with what you've come through, what you've learned, *what you've lived to tell*, which isn't necessarily a matter of age. Maybe *tell* is the operative word for my purposes here because it presupposes that having really 'come through,' you're not going to keep your experience to yourself. . . . [A]s a survivor, you're ready to bear witness . . . ." The "survivor" it is, then, who has "earned the right to talk about" his experience, who has "*indeed lived to tell it*" (p. x).

Just such a character, of course, among several others like her in the collection called *The Single Heart*[3], narrates, in "You Scoundrel of a Beast," her own story of survival, of having "prevailed" over selfishness and heartlessness, and sums up her triumph in the words, "But somehow I managed and *lived to tell it all*, and got into another firm where my *really unique* talents seemed better appreciated" (p. 149). More than once in the stories we hear about the family tradition of not one but five Christmas dinners each years, one at the house of each brother in the family, when "they all welcomed the opportunity to get together

[2](Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1987).
[3](Nashville, Tennessee: Aurora Publishers, Inc., 1971).

and *tell over and over again the same old tales* that we had all heard a thousand times before, and it used to try my patience something fierce to have to hear them again."[4]

And if the specific word used is not "tell" or "telling," it is certain to be "talk" or "talking." Near the end of "The Summer of the Window-Peeper," we are told that "all the to-do . . . died down" and that "people began to talk less and less about him and turn their attention to something else. There always was plenty to talk about in Woodville anyway" (*AG*, p. 52). After Mrs. Higgins suffers her heart attack (in "Mrs. Higgins's Heart"), she is "supposed to stay very quiet and not do any more talking than she could help . . . But Mrs. Higgins kept on talking just the same. When Willie and Aunt Lulie had gone out of the room and left you alone with her, she would look at you and grin and say, 'Let's talk. They won't know anything about it'" (*AG*, p. 71). The boy's Uncle John is fond of recalling uncles from a still earlier generation—Uncle Reek and Uncle Razz and Uncle Rafe—who "didn't like anything better than just sitting around talking. It didn't matter what it was about; they just liked to *talk* . . . But Uncle John said things weren't like that any more. Nobody liked to sit around and just talk these days" (*AG*, pp. 79-80). In "Mr. Andrew and the Big Cedar Tree," after the murder-suicide involving Mr. Andrew and his woman, Florene, has been discovered, the boy tells us that "then people really did turn loose and talk . . . All kinds of tales went around then, sure enough" (*AG*, p. 95).

In "The Tower and the Pear Tree," we find that such habits of "talk" help later to drive the narrator away from the South, away from "the good manners which, I thought, all too often concealed true feelings and the constant stream of small talk which, though extremely pleasant and comfortable, seemed to me often inconsequential and designed to obscure what I took to be the harsh realities of existence. Southerners, I thought, talked and talked about nothing at all really . . . " (*SH*, p. 166). Such people, no doubt, are among the half-thoughtless vulgar who (as the narrator notes in "What Do You Want Written on Your Tombstone?") "never learn about the uses of reticence, to say nothing of silence. . . . On the other hand, all such public noise-making does help to fill up the silence, which is a very terrifying prospect . . . " (*BB*, p. 155).

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[4]Robert Drake, *The Burning Bush* (Nashville, Tennessee: Aurora Publishers, Inc., 1975), p. 161.

When Drake answered an interviewer's question about "influences" on his own writing, he noted that "the Drakes are good tale-tellers" and that "I can tell you right now . . . who the [other] good tale-tellers were in my town," which leads him to suggest that the primary influence on him as a writer is just *talk*. "You see," he goes on, "most Southerners, I've always said, are afraid of silence, because they just fill up the air with talk."[5] At which point we might be tempted to exclaim, "Shoot, child, what you talking about?"—echoing Cousin Emma Jane Powell, who was trying to emphasize as sure-enough true "whatever she was telling that might seem farfetched and incredible" (*Survivors*, p. 29).

What we're talking about, then, you might be moved to say, is the juncture at which all the inveterate, undeliberated, and multifarious habits of "telling" in the Drake stories shade into some of the more serious processes of "reckoning." One plausible site for pondering such a movement would be "I've Been Dying All My Life; How About You?" (in *The Burning Bush*), in which the narrator, having now turned forty, is ostensibly explaining himself to counselor or priest, and in which the very motions of the "telling" repeat and underscore the substance of what is being uttered.

The first sentence heads out matter-of-factly enough, and might at first suggest the opening of a story by any one of a dozen other mid-century writers: "Our house was right on the street to the cemetery; and every time there was a big funeral, my nurse and I would sit out on the front steps and watch the procession go by . . . " (*BB*, p. 145). But almost at once the topic shifts from funerals to weddings, and then to the whole matter of the human need for drama and order in ritual, in ceremony, until the digression falters and the narrator picks up the earlier thread: "But this is all beside the point because what I really wanted to talk to you about was death and how I came to know about it and feel about it and why it has been on my mind more or less all my life" (*BB*, p. 146). Telling about his early direct and uneuphemised awareness of death and dying, he seems about to drift into yet another digression when he suddenly puts to himself, or to his listener, some rhetorical questions: "Did I get too big an overdose of death somewhere along the line? . . . Did I not perhaps make too big a thing of it somehow?"—questions

[5]Interview with Robert Drake by Ashby Bland Crowder in 1986, in *Writing in The Southern Tradition: Interviews with Five Contemporary Authors* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, Georgia: Rodopi Press, 1990), p. 143.

that do then lead to another digression, a "long theological tangent" as he calls it. But something like a final moment of candor does emerge: "[M]ore and more I've been seeing myself drowning into death—myself and all the Universe, filling up with death, a dying system strangling in its own filth, its own exhaust fumes, running down as it runs out of gas, and headed for sure oblivion. And I know that's true, and you know it's true. But tell me why I'm so obsessed with the idea. Is it that I'm afraid of life, the risk it involves always, whether with people or with things? Death, after all, can be managed when you're the one left alive to tell the tale. But life—and the living—can all change so quickly" (*BB*, p. 149).

"Death, after all, can be managed *when you're the one left alive to tell the tale.*" This line, once paused over, tends to resonate backward and forward in the memorial recuperations of all the Drake stories—like ripples resistlessly pulsing outward from the heavy stone dropped in the glassy pool. Yes: "telling the tale," even telling the same familiar and familial tales over and over again, is very much the manner and form by which you can "manage" death: the accepted convention by which you may "fill up the air with talk" and thus for a time spell away the "terrifying prospect" of silence and a swiftly gathering dark.

And thus it runs nostalgically, elegiacally, and, yes, at times garrulously, in one after another of Drake's stories. In "Christmas Sorrows, Christmas Joys," the story that closes *The Burning Bush*, the dinner-table talk is vivid and celebratory, but "practically every tale told concerned at least one person who was dead . . . Death, it always seemed to me, was the uninvited guest at those revels; and his presence hovered behind and above and over every conversation, every remark. Whom would he take next from that picture frame?" (*BB*, p. 165). The death of a favorite aunt, when funeral wreath replaced the Christmas wreath on the door, made it "the season of death: the Christmas carols mocked my sorrow, with their emphasis on joy, light, peace coming into the world. And I would not be comforted" (*BB*, p. 166). More places become empty, until, the year after his father's death, the Christmas dinners cease altogether. "Fittingly," he tells us, "it was my mother's death that seemed to put the final seal on all Christmas death's for me: she too died a few days before Christmas"—clinching the fact that "Christmas for me, for a good many years, had been a kind of measuring stick against which to judge the present losses and predict the future ones—a milestone rather than a feast."

Though the young and developing boy who narrates the stories in *Amazing Grace* encounters the now mysterious, now disturbing, world of adulthood in various guises, repeatedly his initiation comes by way of significant and telling deaths. Mr. Seaton's in "The Funeral," then Cousin Stuart's in "The Bridegroom Cometh," then Aunt Janie's and Mrs. Edney's, then Stuart's again in "Uncle John and the Trail of Years," then Mr. Marcus's, and finally the Daddy's death in "By Thy Good Pleasure" to close the book. The "voices of those women who still talk at the back of my mind" in *The Single Heart* may represent virtually an entire community, but repeatedly their talk is a way of "managing" all that is otherwise bewildering and unendurable. Nor is it possible to forget the moments in *The Home Place*, that masterpiece of Drake family keepsake and reminiscence,[6] when the poignancy of irrevocable loss and the solidity of what has been known in love are balanced to exact perfection in its elegiac telling and reckoning.

In the well-peopled and vividly depicted world of the Drake stories, of course the motives and impulsions behind the telling are many—some in laughter, some in vindictive delight, some in bemused regret, some in sustained amazement at the odd configuring of the human critter even in a single confined place. The Drake stories show us also how much room there is for responses that may usefully disappoint the merely respectable or complacent eye. But it is in the eddies between "telling" and "reckoning"—the stuff the stories are made of and the substance of what we make of them—that they bid for a permanent lodging in the House of Fiction. And as all voracious and grateful readers know, in this respect more deeply than a lot of self-delighting critics, in the House of Fiction there are many delectable mansions.

[6]Robert Drake, *The Home Place: A Memory and a Celebration* (Memphis, Tennessee: Memphis State University Press, 1980).

JEFFREY J. FOLKS

Tennessee Wesleyan College

A Southern Realist: The Short Stories of Robert Drake

ROBERT DRAKE IS FOND OF STATING that nothing he writes about can be considered, in any real sense, "news to anyone," a point that he reiterated in the "Preface" to the 25th anniversary issue of *Amazing Grace*: "I don't see myself as writing news, at least in the sense of headlines; and I'm certainly not trying to convert anybody to anything."[1] It is a point that Drake restated in a subsequent interview published in the *Mississippi Quarterly*:

> This sounds like a rationalization, but there's nothing in the world about anything I do, about either me or my work, that in any way is "news." I'm not saying that lets me off the hook about things, but I think a lot of people expect that about literature, and as Conrad says in that wonderful Preface to The Nigger of the "Narcissus," people expect the wrong things from literature.[2]

In an age in which Americans admit to watching on average eight hours of television per day, and when much of that viewing takes the form of "news," it is refreshing to find one writer who elects not to offer warmed-over headlines or heated-up spectacle. "It has always seemed to me that all those who want to crusade or instruct by means of the arts usually get it wrong or they oversimplify in their zeal," writes Drake in a recent essay.[3]

Of course, in another sense Robert Drake's fiction may be news, news of a human community of individuals, uncensored news of human kindness and of human meanness, of the Old Adam ever-present. Drake's stories continue to tell the news, less and less often heard, of

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[1]Robert Drake, *Amazing Grace*, Twenty-fifth Anniversary Edition (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1990), p. xiv.
[2]Jeffrey J. Folks, "Interview with Robert Drake," *Mississippi Quarterly*, 43 (Spring 1990), 222.
[3]Robert Drake, "The Writer's Word," Unpublished essay, p. 7.

the necessity of real human contact (not always or even primarily of the physical variety), of sitting down and listening to one another, of humor based on an appreciation of life's difficulties and the mixed potential of human nature. There is also the news that a person comes from some place, develops out of particular experiences and backgrounds, with a mind and character formed by family, friends, teachers, and colleagues. An eminent critic wrote of Franz Kafka that "only the unbiased, concrete study of individuals gradually brings us further along"[4] and much the same could be said of Robert Drake. A realist's openness to experience underpins his narrative, for he writes from the vantage point of one unique human being: "if we see the world in certain ways that are uniquely our own, then I think we must pass it all along thus to our readers—and not apologize either. Because the limits, the refusals, the "no"s are what make us—and our work—what they are, warts and all" ("The Writer's Word," p. 11).

The reader of *Amazing Grace*, and of the four collections of stories and memoirs that follow it, is struck by the author's sense of obligation to state exactly what was, to remember the past and those living and dead from the past. Like "Uncle John," the uncle who becomes a Methodist preacher and ardent photographer, Drake transmits a record of the past, and of the living and dead from the past, in apparently photographic-like scrapbooks. As he says, what he is attempting primarily is to get their "voices" down, but what is meant by this was never the mere recording of dialect or speech patterns. Cleanth Brooks was correct, in reviewing *The Burning Bush*, to point out that the stories convey more than surface authenticity. "His book exhibits much more than the surface of culture; indeed, it reflects a point of view, a pattern of values, and an attitude toward reality that derive from a living community."[5]

Drake's fiction is a significant historical record of a time and place, but more important it is fiction. As Drake wrote in the "Preface" to the reissued *Amazing Grace*: "I think it would be a mistake to regard the book as thinly disguised autobiography because of course imagination, more than memory, is really dominant there" (p. xi). *Amazing Grace* achieves what all artists aspire to. Through technique, voice, form, and manner of

[4]Elias Canetti, *The Conscience of Words* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985), p. 111.
[5]Quoted in *The Country of Robert Drake: Hearing and Understanding the Voices of West Tennessee* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, Division of Continuing Education, n.d.), p. 12.

telling, the stories provide a representation of life that is convincing and thus they allow us a point of recognition in which, regardless of whether we have grown up in the same historical or sociological circumstances, we know that our lives have shared similar moments. It should go without saying that all fiction and all art at its best aspire to this truth of representation, and that art contains truth beyond the level of sociological reality. The authenticity of art, indeed, begins in the materials of a certain historical time and place, but it must not stop at that point. Otherwise, in the long run it loses its ability to communicate what is essentially shared among people in all times and places. It should also go without saying that fiction which does achieve the level of art gives the reader a pleasure which is lacking in topical writing.

Austin Warren remarked, concerning the first-person narration, that "Drake's art lies in his sense of the limits allowed to such sketches and stories. . . . He is a master of the monologue" (quoted in *Country of Robert Drake*, p. 8). Despite the "limitations" of growing up in a middle-class, small-town environment, Drake's narrators see a great deal indeed. In "Good Morning, Merry Sunshine" the boy confidently tells of starting school but foresees none of the actual trials so near ahead. What this particular narrator sees includes something of the reality of life for the school janitor, Uncle Urshel, and his wife, Susanna—a mixed life blessed with extended family, burdened with labor (though no more so than others) and troubled by the verbal attacks of some whites (though fortunate in the respect and love of *nearly* all the town). There is also the troubling appearance of John Edgar Botts, the spelling bee opponent from Miss Beersheba's class. John Edgar is one of the narrator's first encounters with the perplexing "wider world" in which the secure platitudes of home are tested and shaken. The lesson of the spelling bee is that life is fundamentally problematic: "Why didn't you win if you did your best?" the boy wonders (*AG*, p. 29).

The shared knowledge of community and the need for acceptance from others are important elements of the boy's conflict in the story "Amazing Grace." At times the boy's aspirations to refinement and to broader knowledge contrast with his father's love of common people and small-town ways. Just as the boy cannot understand the line from the hymn—"Why was it so sweet to be a wretch?" he asks—he cannot empathize with his father's acceptance of provincial existence and of what seems the circumscribed imagination of common people. The temporary resolution comes about through love, a form of grace, as the boy

hugs his father, reciprocating his love although he cannot really share the older generation's secure communal identity.

Perhaps wishing to jettison entirely "who he is and where he came from," the narrator realizes only after leaving Woodville that what remains for him is a profound sense of loss. The sense of continuity is comforting in the way that it surrounds the individual with reminders of past generations, those ancestors whom the living feel a need to make present. It also provides, quite simply, a sense of stability in a rapidly changing society. The noticeable loneliness of Drake's characters is in part the consequence of the jettisoning of the past; the strength that might be gained from continuity is lost and the individual is made aware of how superficial and unstable his identity is.

Like Mrs. Edney, his high-school English teacher, the boy has Macbeth's ambition to rise, to travel far beyond Woodville, but ambition is accompanied by misgiving. As he says of Mrs. Edney, comparing her to Macbeth, "Maybe she was afraid, if she didn't watch out, she could get hard, too" (*AG*, p. 75). What he admires is her energy and love, especially her determined stand on the side of poetry and beauty and her resolve not to be dragged down by "the person from Porlock," symbol of the practical world of obligations.

Drake implies that the rituals of life, its weddings and funerals, hold more and more meaning for the very reason that so much of modern life does not possess significance. The author's love of ritual is related to an aesthetic leaning toward form: "I like ceremonies. It seemed to me as a child that so much of life was just sitting around waiting for something to happen; that's what bothered me," he said in a recent interview (*Mississippi Quarterly*, p. 231). In "The Bridegroom Cometh" Stuart, only recently married, is killed in Burma just after the conclusion of World War II but only a "real" funeral, with the body finally returned to the States, puts an end to years of uneasy grief. The story is revealing in what it tells about Drake's authorial knowledge. Altogether conscious of "alienation," of its roots and varieties in this century, Drake rejects the easy and fashionable acceptance of negation which has been one aspect of modernism. His writing preserves the traditional community, its loyalties, its positive values, while well aware of that community's limitations, and for that matter, the limitations of all human communities and of all things human. If I understand it correctly, Drake's point is that all actual communities of human beings are wrought with

limitation—that weakness of "original sin" is central to the human condition. The modern alternative is to adopt the posture of constant negation of the human condition itself, either to assert that the human condition does not involve limitation or to assert that human weakness can be overcome.

Drake may have had this fact in mind when, asked by A. B. Crowder about the difficulties of his career, he responded: "I don't think I'm writing things that people want to hear. . . . I don't think I'm in fashion. I write about people in small towns, who, by and large, are not going anywhere else. They're not demonstrating, not protesting. They have terrible hangups with themselves, but nobody gets castrated, nobody gets lynched, nobody gets raped. Really, I don't have much to offer."[6] In the same interview Drake speaks of the "internal violence" of his stories: "I don't think anybody can say the world is any more cruel than I know it to be. At the same time I don't think anybody can say it's more wonderful than I know it to be" (Crowder, pp. 133-134).

Drake's characters are by and large aware of the indications of modern alienation: the sense that modern existence has been drained of meaning, that modern language has been devalued by a false and sentimental vocabulary and aesthetic, that the materialism and conformity of bourgeois life has set the middle class at odds with an increasingly radical and bohemian conception of the artist, that traditional belief carries less and less conviction. While some in Woodville, perhaps the Moss sisters, appear oblivious to this transformation and go on living contentedly in apparently blissful ignorance, most others, including "Father" in *Amazing Grace*, recognize the crisis and go about their lives in the face of it.

James H. Justus has stressed this "normative" level of life and character in Drake's stories: "These are stories whose strengths are nuance and color and characterization; what makes them memorable is a finely traced depiction of unremarkable people going about doing what unremarkable people do."[7] As a result of this focus on the "unremarkable," Drake is not embarrassed to write of love and friendship, or of

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[6]A. B. Crowder, *Writing in the Southern Tradition: Interviews with Five Contemporary Authors* (Costerus: New Series, Vol. 78; Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), pp. 132-133.
[7]James H. Justus, "Raising Ebenezers, a Foreword," *Amazing Grace*, Twenty-fifth Anniversary Edition (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1990), p. viii.

other forms of positive value. Of Aunt Janie (Jane Malone Buford) he writes that "everybody in Woodville loved her so much." There is, however, a characteristic ambiguity in the narrator's summation that she "loved herself to death" (*AG*, p. 86). This phrasing, in fact, discloses that both the narrator and Miss Janie are "moderns," despite their simple exterior way of life. Alongside the insistence on the need to *create* meaning for oneself, there is a recognition of the natural condition of lack of meaning, and it is this frightening disorder that drives both Miss Janie to "spread love around" and the narrator to make sense of her, and that explains their sympathetic mutual understanding. Thus, in "Aunt Janie and the Angels" the boy learns that the loss of Miss Janie must be "made up for" by a deliberate effort on the part of the living: "I knew now, maybe for the first time, that when part of your life goes out, you just have to get busy and fill it in right quick; thinking about the emptiness doesn't do you any good at all" (*AG*, p. 64).

The positive potential of life in Woodville is frankly stated, in language that might raise hair on the neck of any true modern. Drake writes of "liking to talk" and "enjoying other people," of verbal endearments and hugs given and received. He traces the simple respect for kin and community, often in the face of not particularly liking "them," and of friendships that transcend class, religious, or ideological affiliation. The need for life to mean something is expressed in a liking for ritual and pageantry and formalized behavior, as well as in the formal order of the stories themselves. Still, the emptiness is always present, often in the form of loneliness, just as madness and anarchy are present in Joseph Conrad's fiction, even as it proclaims the need for work, routine, and "civilization."

This is something of what Robert Drake means when he says that his work is "in no sense of the word, 'news' to anybody." In an unpublished essay, "The Writer as Hunger Artist," Drake insists on the importance of "saying no." He points out the pressure that the writer is under to write about "news," those matters of topical importance that please an audience seeking diversion through fleeting moments of significance. Drake relates what he has been about for these thirty years, and what he continues to be about in writing stories that go back always into memory and that go deeply into a particular time and place, the imagined community of Woodville in West Tennessee.

As a writer Drake is far too realistic to believe that a simplistic return

to a traditional way of life will solve very many contemporary problems, but he is also too realistic to think that we can afford a wholesale dismantling of a heritage of beliefs, customs, and values. Most important, in his writing, the measure of all things remains mankind. Robert Drake is too fine an artist to distort all that human beings are capable of. In "getting the voices right," he is also recording what human beings are and what they create, for good or ill. We should not expect more, from his or any other fiction.

A Robert Drake Bibliography

INTRODUCTION

Robert Drake has been an active scholar and writer for almost three decades. In addition to his short fiction, he has written essays, reviews, newspaper columns, and memoirs enough to fill eighteen typed pages with bibliographical entries. His four books of short stories contain eighty-six stories. And although he has chosen to omit six of the uncollected stories from his previous volumes, the seven stories that have appeared since the publication of *Survivors and Others* promise yet another Drake collection. [This bibliography is based on Drake's own "running list of his publications over the years"; the copy was provided by James A. Perkins of Westminster College, Pennsylvania.]

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" 'Dark Angel' Vivien Leigh," *U-T Daily Beacon*, March 3, 1978, p. 2; reprinted in *The Lauderdale County Enterprise*, March 9 , 1978, p. 4.

MEMOIRS

"Donald Davidson and the Ancient Mariner," *Vanderbilt Alumnus*, January-February 1964, pp. 18-22. (Memoir of Donald Davidson, Professor of English, Vanderbilt University, on the occasion of his retirement)

"Daddy the Talker, Daddy the Lover," *Christian Century*, 92 (August 6-13, 1975), 709-711; reprinted in *The Home Place.*

"The Old Tales, the Old Times," *Modern Age*, 20 (Summer 1976), 315-319; reprinted in *The Home Place.*

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"The Grace of God at Maple Grove Methodist," *Modern Age*, 21 (Winter 1977), 87-90; reprinted as "The Grace of God at the Maple Grove Methodist Church" in *The Home Place.*

"The Home Place," *Modern Age*, 21 (Summer 1977), 308-310; reprinted in *The Home Place.*

"The Picture Frame," *Modern Age*, 21 (Fall 1977), 414-417; reprinted in *The Home Place.*

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"King Lear at Maple Grove," *Modern Age*, 22 (Fall 1978), 403-407; reprinted in *The Home Place.*

"Portrait in Black and White," *Christian Century*, 96 (October 24, 1979), 1038-1040; reprinted in *The Home Place.*

"Grandma," *Modern Age*, 24 (Summer 1980), 290-294; reprinted in *The Home Place.*

"The Big Room," *The Lauderdale County Enterprise*, October 20, 1980, p. 1.

"Celebratory Statement," *Modern Age*, 26 (Summer/Fall 1982), 386-387. (Remarks on the Silver Jubilee of *Modern Age*)

"She *Won't* Cook," *Southern Partisan*, 3 (Fall 1983), 47-48.

"Morning Song," *Southern Partisan*, 4 (Spring 1984), 51-54.

"In Memoriam: Austin Warren (1899-1986)," *Modern Age*, 30 (Summer/Fall 1986), 197-199.

INTERVIEWS

"Robert Drake," *Writing in the Southern Tradition: Interviews With Five Contemporary Authors*, ed. A. B. Crowder (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990), pp. 119-151.

"An Interview with Robert Drake," by Jeffrey J. Folks, *Mississippi Quarterly*, 43 (Spring 1990), 221-233.

Scholars interested in the study of William Gilmore Simms are forming a society. The inaugural meeting of the Simms Society will coincide with a symposium on Simms, to commemorate his birthday. It will take place April 15-17, 1993, at the University of Arkansas. The symposium, under the auspices of the Center for Arkansas and Regional Studies at the university, will explore the theme of "Simms and the American Frontier," with preference given to papers on Simm's border writings and other depictions of the frontier. There will be provision for papers dealing exclusively with the frontier as well as papers dealing exclusively with Simms. Persons interesed in being charter members of the Simms Society should write to John C. Guilds, Chairman of the Program Committee, Department of English, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR 72701. Persons interested in submitting papers should send a brief description of the paper to John C. Guilds before September 15, 1992.

Notes and Documents

A Letter to the Editor

Sir,

At this stage in my life I am a great deal more interested in whether the diesel engine of my 24-foot boat will run than in the assumptions inherent in the study of Southern literature. Even so, I am nevertheless impelled to brief comment on the several essays and reviews, by Michael Kreyling, James Mellard, Pearl McHaney, Leslie Kathleen Hankins, etc., in your Fall 1991 issue, all of which tend to implicate me in something or the other, I'm not sure just what.

First of all, I wish to say that assertions by Mr. T. Jefferson Humphreys to the contrary notwithstanding, the idea that such a thing as a "Rubin Generation" of monolithic Southern literature scholars exists or has existed is so much tommyrot. Mr. Humphreys, whose gall is so colossal that it deserves to be tripartite, has apparently got me confused with a Pepsi-Cola commercial.

Next, let me apologize for the fact that back in 1950-1952 when Robert D. Jacobs and I were putting together *Southern Renascence: The Literature of the Modern South*, we didn't know about Women's Lib, deconstruction, monologic historicism, etc., etc. We were terribly ignorant, weren't we?

What we did know, however, was that there was an awful lot of good fiction and poetry written during the previous quarter-century in which the South seemed to be importantly involved, yet almost none of the important literary scholarship of the day appeared to be interested in the relationships between the literature and the cultural and social milieu out of which it obviously rose.

The only critics—they weren't considered "scholars" then—who did think there was anything to the matter were the Vanderbilt group (in whose existence, by the way, the authorities at Vanderbilt University were utterly uninterested). Is it any wonder, then, that we, or anyone else with any concern for what was "Southern" about Southern literature, were drawn toward them?

The issue wasn't one of "global synthesis" versus "cultural pluralism"; it was whether as a literary scholar one was to be allowed to read, study, and write about William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Robert Penn Warren, and other living authors. What I like to think is that in assembling *Southern Renascence*, however uneven its contents may have been, we helped a little to establish that right.

To those, however, who would see *Southern Renascence* as an act of uncritical Confederate piety (and I do not deny that, in the year 1953, there was some of that ingredient present), I should like to note the simultaneous presence, in that book published the year before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, of an essay entitled "Faulkner and the Black Shadow," by Irene C. Edmunds. Do those bold spirits who would castigate that forty-year-old collection for its narrowness and blindness have any idea of how heretical it was to publish not merely an essay on the topic of Faulkner and Race, but one that was written by a young black woman?

As for the matter of the contents of anthologies, may I point out the existence of certain crass but unfortunately relevant factors? Anthologies have to be adopted for classroom use. As anyone who has ever sought to compile one knows all too well, there are always certain writers, certain poems and stories, etc., that teachers expect to find in an anthology. If too many of them are missing, the anthology will not be adopted. The trick, therefore, is to get other things into the anthology that one thinks are also important but insufficiently read, alongside the expected pieces.

Moreover, anyone assembling a textbook anthology knows that if the price per copy of the book runs too high, it simply isn't going to be used. The reprint permission fees for some works by some writers can be astronomical; and there are only so many pages of contents permitted if the book is to be kept within usable proportions. (When *The Literary South* was declared out of print ten years or so after it first appeared because of what to a textbook house were poor sales, and the Louisiana State University Press agreed to take it over in order to keep it available for its relatively few users, it was still several thousand dollars short of reaching the stage at which the editor would begin to receive any royalties whatsoever.)

There is one assumption, however, to which I remain recalcitrant-

ly and unreformedly attached, despite the argumentation about all objects equally being texts. It is, that in a literature course, taught by literature professors and offered in English departments, it still makes more sense to try to get at cultural, political and historical problems through works of fiction and poetry rather than non-fiction.

I say this because what drew me to the study of literature, rather than of history, philosophy, anthropology, etc., in the first place was the imaginative potentiality of stories and poems. To my mind they offered a unique and matchless window upon human experience. I daresay that something of the same reason accounts for why almost everybody who teaches in English departments originally chose that professional route.

It is also precisely what peoples our classes with students. And if it ever stops doing so, and students no longer find poetry and fiction worth reading and exploring, there will cease to be a place for the study of Southern or any other kind of literature.

My task (and my privilege), as a teacher of literature rather than of something else, was to help my students read, comprehend, and enjoy fiction and poetry—which meant, in part at least, to try to use novels, stories and poems to deal with the human and cultural problems they embodied. Not only that, but I was and am convinced that novels, stories and poems can provide a way of understanding those problems that no other way of going about it, however revelatory, can offer.

When anyone tells me, therefore, that all writing is equally "literature," and that there is no particular reason, in a textbook anthology designed for classroom use, to emphasize poems and stories at the expense of other kinds of writing, all I can say is, *then why teach something called "literature" at all?*

Our trouble as literature teachers is that by its very nature, what we must do for a living is to deal with human experience second-hand, so to speak. Novelists and poets write about human experience. We teach and write about what novelists and poets have written about human experience. We are thus at two removes from the experience itself. This can be frustrating; it makes us feel that what we do is unimportant, derivative, for there is a kind of "Catch 22" to the whole business. That is, the reason why we read the novels and poems is that they are about

"real life," and yet what draws us to them is that they deal with that life *as* fiction or poetry rather than directly, as "straight" documentation.

The result is that we are always looking for ways to make what we do seem more immediately and directly confrontational with "real life" than it is. We keep trying to outflank and get around the presence of the literary imagination in order to deal directly with what the novel or poem is about, instead of doing it through and with the literary imagination itself.

It is this sense of being forced to deal with experience at second hand rather than directly, I think, that makes us feel unimportant and marginal, and that causes us to be vulnerable to every ideology, movement and ism that comes along. We can be Marxists, deconstructionists, psychoanalysts, textual bibliographers, contextualists, cultural pluralists, whatever; anything except "mere litterateurs."

To palliate the unease we feel when we adopt such schematic devices, we haul out the time-worn rationale, dear to zealots of all ages and kinds, that everybody who is not with us is therefore against us. Not to profess an ideology, we say, is itself an ideology, and thus a way of finessing what is true, good, and beautiful—i.e., of being an elitist, a "covert" imperialist, racist, male chauvinist, obscurantist, vegetarian, New Critic, or whatever.

The logic underlying such reasoning seems pretty thin to me. It is tantamount to saying that because baseballs and cantaloupes are both round, anyone who does not choose to eat a baseball or throw a cantaloupe is refusing to confront the real world.

As a card-carrying Democrat I am far from denying the importance of ideas and the usefulness of schematizations, but I shall go to my cremation insisting that (a) no idea or schematization can do justice to the complexities of human experience, that (b) novels and poems provide a unique way of examining those complexities, and that (c) one need not apologize for devoting one's professional life to reading, teaching, or writing about novels and poems *as* the novels and poems that they are.

Allen Tate, whose name seems to be anathema today, wrote once of the difficulties of what he called "conducting one's education in pub-

lic." I daresay I understand what he meant. There are things that I wrote and published when a young man that make me writhe when I come upon them today. I comfort myself, however, with certain lines that the Mississippi novelist Marcel Proust has the painter Elstir speak in *Within a Budding Grove*:

> "There is no man," he began, "however wise, who has not at some period of his youth said things, or lived in a way the consciousness of which is so unpleasant to him in later life that he would gladly, if he could, expunge it from his memory. And yet he ought not entirely to regret it, because he cannot be certain that he has indeed become a wise man—so far as it is possible for any of us to be wise—unless he has passed through all the fatuous or unwholesome incarnations by which that ultimate stage must be preceded. We are not provided with wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness which no one can take for us, an effort no one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina LOUIS D. RUBIN, JR.

ESSAY-REVIEW

JAMES M. MELLARD

Northern Illinois University

Tropologies of Space: Metaphoric and Metonymic Places in Literature

Where? Place in Recent North American Fiction, ed. Karl-Heinz Westarp. Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press. 119 pp. $19.65.

Where? Place in Recent North American Fiction is a volume of the journal *The Dolphin*, edited in the department of English at Aarhus University in Denmark. While Tim Caudery is the general editor of the journal, this special issue is edited by Karl-Heinz Westarp, who previously co-edited a similar volume published by Aarhus University Press—*Realist of Distances* (1987), focusing on Flannery O'Connor. *Where?* includes a poem at the outset, then a somewhat theoretical discussion of space and literature, and finally some nine essays focusing on specific writers, all fiction writers except poet Gary Snyder, the subject of the book's third piece. The opening poem, by Patrick Lane, is called "Indian Tent Rings" and, appropriately, sets the thematic provenance of the volume, for the essays deal with the human meanings of both place and placelessness. The poem broaches both conditions and the ironies and indeterminacies in the relation. The poem speaks, for example, of a city man and woman who seem lost and unsure of themselves in the wide open spaces of a western landscape populated by cattle, coyotes, antelope, and ancient Indian rings rising "slowly out of time like teeth/ in the mouth of a dead man" (p. 9). The terrain evokes the historic and the primitive, for it speaks to them not only of Mycenae and Stonehenge, but also of the origins of their own bodies in the animal kingdom. Despite the sheer overwhelming presence of this place, Lane's speaker emphasizes the irony of their believing more in the reality of some mythic Europe than they do in the North American place on which they stand. "It matters that they search for what/ they do not understand," writes Lane. But whatever resolution there is in the poem comes from a simple fact: "they

are here, the woman caught in the ancient/ circle and the man circling below her, his eyes/ trying to find a thing that is more than/ an idea, a bit of pebble carved into himself" (p. 10).

Like this poem, many of the essays in this collection address the notion that place, whatever else it may be, is primal, defining, and, for many, liberating. *To be* is to be in a place; not to be is to feel one's self unattached, isolated, deracinated from a particular locus. But there is place and then there is space: mere space is not place. Place has a human, subjective dimension along with its other qualities. In "Space and Literature: Notes Toward a Theory of Mapping," David Kranes identifies the two basic ways of regarding space—the abstract, Cartesian, Rationalist way, and the concrete, Berkeleyan, Empiricist way. The first is objective, perspectival, emptied of content, and seems to belong to science. The second is subjective, experiential, and phenomenologically full, and is the one that drives literature and, more importantly, most human beings. As James Houston, a geographer, says, "Space . . . has no meaning other than a mathematical one . . . . Place, on the other hand, has a human context" that evokes belonging, identity, vocation, memory, destiny (p. 23). We may say, though it is not a claim made in *Where?*, that the first way is the metaphoric, the merely metaphoric: Lane's poem evokes this sense when the man and woman invoke *like*: "It is *like*,/ they say. But *like* what?" (p. 10). The second way, we may say, is metonymic: it involves linkages to the concrete, associations with the particular, intimations of the unspeakably, silently brutish *real*. If ideas drive the metaphoric, the metonymic is driven by things, objects, sensory impressions—the seen, heard, felt, smelled, tasted.

While Lane's poems and Kranes's belletristic essay establish a rather imaginative frame for the essays in the volume, the essays themselves seem to me rather too predictable for the most part. Dare I say commonplace? These essays suggest that place is not the most fruitful topos for many of the works and writers addressed. Virtually all the essays seem to have been written to one formula or another. The one formula's basic emplotment entails characters who are at first alienated, uprooted, seeking an identity; somewhere along the way, if the plot is comic, they find a place that evokes a history and with it an identity they can call their own. While tragic or ironic versions of this plot may exist (Lane's poem exhibits it, for instance), the comic plot dominates. Moreover, it begins to seem almost archetypal in the treatments of literature by minority writers. In Richard E. Fisher's "Place in Recent

Native American Fiction," we find, almost inevitably, that "In a very real sense, all Native Americans have been uprooted" (p. 35). Thus in many novels—including N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* and *The Death of Jim Loney*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, and Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*—the basic plot carries its Native American protagonists back to the primal landscape whose energizing associations redefine them in positive ways. Says Fisher, no doubt with all the irony he can muster, "contemporary Native American authors seem to feel that there are good Indians and bad Indians. The good ones find the place where (their creators say) they belong; the bad ones do not. The good ones opt 'Red,' the bad ones opt 'White'—and are lost" (p. 34).

Though there are significant variations on the theme Fisher identifies here, it recurs in a clear enough way in the work of a black American author who is taken to be typical of writers in that category. Says Darlene E. Erickson, in "Toni Morrison: The Black Search for Place in America," the "sense of *not belonging* in this place, of being *out of place*, . . . is the subject of Morrison's work" (p. 46). The objective of the African American seems the same as it is for the Native American. "As Morrison searches both African and American history from slavery to the present day," writes Erickson, "she looks for ways to help blacks develop their own *sense of place*, their own sense of family, their own mythology, their own reasons for belonging, their own antidotes for *homelessness*" (p. 47). In Erickson's analysis, it becomes plain that for the African American to know his or her place has nothing to do with social hierarchy, as the encomium "He knows his place" once had. Rather, it has everything to do with a people's finding identificatory associations uncontaminated by their previous condition of servitude or—as with Fisher's Native Americans—things "White."

Despite my reservations about the limitations an approach to place seems to impose, I must say nonetheless that these two essays by Fisher and Erickson do not fall into the trap that some of the other authors do. Fisher and Erickson do at least deal with place as place; in the terms of my introductory paragraphs, they keep it metonymic, concrete, phenomenological. But I cannot say that about the essay by Joseph C. Schöpp on Raymond Federman's *To Whom It May Concern* or the two essays by editor Westarp, one on Flannery O'Connor's "Displaced Person" and the other on Walker Percy's fiction. Schöpp and Westarp, I think, too readily convert the places into metaphors and symbols, there-

by immediately emptying them out of the metonymic specificities that make space *place*. In Schöpp's case, there is at least some excuse, for Federman does not want to deal with representation and therefore metonymic space. For one thing, *To Whom It May Concern* exhibits a postmodern philosophy in which the traditional, mimetic, representational aim of fiction is viewed as impossible. For another thing, the novel "represents"—I can't use any other word here—Federman's view of the Holocaust, which is his ostensible subject: "How," he asks, "to speak about something which is basically unutterable?" Federman's answer, in part, is to write of a place—a closet in which he and his protagonist hid in order to survive the unspeakable horrors of the final solution. Thus the space of which Federman writes carries little of the phenomenological weight of place evoked in other writers. Instead, the very absence of qualities in this space determines its paradoxical usefulness in Federman's novel.

The paradoxes in Federman's position lead us to the other virtually archetypal plot exhibited in these essays. In this plot, rather than a character's finding a place and with it an identity, he or she instead discovers that the real place is merely an excuse for the metaphysical. Here, that sense of paradox found in Federman has no meaning for writers such as either O'Connor or Percy. But their metaphysical orientation causes Westarp himself to fall prey to the all-too-easy metaphorical transformation of physical places into metaphysical themes or ideas. Two problems result. One is the banalization of the theme. As Fisher and Erickson find the same patterns in Native American and African American writers, so Westarp achieves precisely the same results whether analyzing Flannery O'Connor or Walker Percy. The other is the trivialization of place itself. I shall examine Westarp's essay on the former in order to make my points.

In "Flannery O'Connor's Displaced Persons," Westarp outlines that second common plot from the perspective of people (white and European) not ordinarily regarded as minority or marginal. Westarp opens his essay with these words:

> Displacement is more than ever an experience that a growing number of people go through. Religious, political, economic reasons have driven individuals, families and whole tribes into the diaspora of leaving their native roots and finding a new existence in a foreign environment. Identification with the place of origin, though often desirable, is no longer possible, and identification with the new place

> and its traditions is necessary, but not easy. More often than not this leads to a traumatic sense of displacement, of existential uprootedness. (p. 89)

In his analysis of O'Connor's "The Displaced Person," Westarp finds in the Polish immigrant Guizac the embodiment of these issues. Naturally, forms of the word "displaced" show up frequently in Westarp's essay as they do in the story. But seldom do they have to do with actual space or place. The word "displacement"—as it does in the paragraph above—floats immediately from the metonymically concrete to the metaphorically abstract. The problem seems almost endemic in the essays collected here, but is typified readily in the title of Ellen W. Munley's essay: "Spatial *Metaphors* in Anne Hébert's *Les enfants du sabbat*: Within and Beyond the Confines of the Convent, the Cabin, and the Quotidian." The problem is also evident in the title of Westarp's second essay: "Lost in the Cosmos: Place in Walker Percy," for the two key terms—cosmos and place—seem quite antithetical: one is that objective, the other that subjective, space defined earlier. Like Munley, Westarp metaphorizes place, but does not seem so aware of the metaphorical operations at work. "At the end of the story," says Westarp of O'Connor's "Displaced Person," "we realize that physical displacement not only affects . . . the refugees or the officially displaced people, displacement affects also those who feel safely surrounded by their possessions" (p. 93). But more important, Westarp says, the physical displacement indicates "a much more comprehensive metaphysical displacement" (p. 93).

Perhaps none of the authors expected such rigorous analysis of the implications of their venture, so my critique may be irrelevant. But the problem I find in Westarp and many of the other essays is complex. In its reductive form it comes to this: when Westarp and others here go from the physical place to the metaphysical idea, they really devalue the very theme that drives this collection of essays. The problem, however, is yet more complicated, for I think the authors can be exactly right about the works they study and still be faulted. The fault I find with Westarp, for example, is that he fails to see how O'Connor herself actually devalues the actual in favor of some hypothetical "true country" beyond life. Now, Westarp, in his closing paragraph, says O'Connor doubly succeeded in this story by addressing a social and political reality at the same time she addressed "our postlapsarian human situation: we are all displaced, we are in the world but not from the world" (p. 97). But is O'Connor's success doubled or halved? She may succeed

in representing the real world as a place, but she cannot allow herself or her redemptive characters ever to love it.

Let me say that, for his part, Westarp also succeeds, and by a similar function of two: he half succeeds. He interprets "The Displaced Person" correctly, but he fails to see that *place* is simply not the issue for O'Connor, and so Guizac the Pole (also patently, as Westarp says, a figuration of Christ) cannot be *dis*placed in any literal way; he—and we as well, according to Westarp's perorational diction about "our postlapsarian situation"—can only ever be displaced in some spiritual, metaphysical, meta-*spatial* way. And that notion, I would contend, unintentionally bespeaks a hollowness in O'Connor (whose fiction I admire immensely) that one does not find in Toni Morrison or those several Native American authors, nor in Gary Snyder, William Styron, or Eudora Welty, each of whom is also treated in an essay in the collection. Thus the book as a whole succeeds according to the same ratio as Westarp. To the extent that Westarp's essays are typical of the book, I think it fails according to its own intentions; to the extent that some of the other essays are typical—ones by James I. McClintock on Snyder, Fisher on Native American fiction, Erickson on Morrison, and Regine Rosenthal on Styron's *Sophie's Choice*—it succeeds rather well. Like Westarp's essays, the book he edits half succeeds. But given the unexpectedly narrow range of the thematic topos, that may well be all we could ever hope.

ESSAY-REVIEW

CLARA JUNCKER

Copenhagen Business School

Southern Diamonds: The Diaries of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, Floride Clemson, Margaret Sloan, and Magnolia Le Guin

The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, edited by Virginia Ingraham Burr. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990; *A Rebel Came Home: The Diary and Letters of Floride Clemson, 1863-1866*, edited by Ernest McPherson Lander, Jr., and Charles M. McGee, Jr. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989; *The Shattered Dream: A Southern Bride at the Turn of the Century*, by Margaret Sloan, edited by Harold Woodell. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991; *A Home-Concealed Woman: The Diaries of Magnolia Wynn Le Guin, 1901-1913*, edited by Charles A. Le Guin. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990.

UPON REREADING HER YEAR'S DIARY IN 1919, Virginia Woolf is struck by the "gallop at which it swings along," but points out that her writing method preserves that which "if I stopped and took thought . . . would never be written at all." This fast pace, Woolf continues, "sweeps up accidentally several stray matters which I would exclude if I hesitated, but which are the diamonds of the dustheap."[1] As the many diaries now emerging from attics and archives testify, Woolf shared with less famous and less literary women both her galloping style and her addiction to journal-writing. Differing in historical circumstance, age, and class, four such women recorded their experiences in the U.S. South in diaries spanning the years 1848 to 1913. Now published, their writings offer to a wider readership an insider's view of historic events such as seces-

[1] *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Anne Olivier Bell. 5 vols. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977-1984), January 20, 1919.

sion, the acquiring of a new silk waist, Civil War, Reconstruction, and a firstborn's new tooth. Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas began her journal in 1848 when she was a Southern belle preoccupied with clothes, beaux, and presents from her affluent planter father; she ended her habit of diary-writing in 1889, soon to become an active participant in the local and national suffrage movement. Floride Clemson died in young womanhood, but covered in her diary and letters a period from 1863 to 1866, when both her beloved South and the young writer herself endeavored to cope with upheaval and readjustment. A generation and a half later, another Southern woman, Margaret Sloan, recorded in her daybook her troublesome initiation into wifehood and its discontents. While Margaret was busily preparing her trousseau, Magnolia Wynn Le Guin struggled to raise a family in the rural, white, agrarian society of Georgia's central piedmont. Her diaries, written between 1901 and 1913 and aptly titled *A Home-Concealed Woman*, demonstrate, like the other three journals discussed here, the author's deep attraction to and need for writing. The authors of those journals create out of the Southern dust a jewel well worth our admiration.

Their inherent appeal aside, these diaries come out at a time when formal autobiography, journals and letters occupy a central position in the critical debate on the status of the subject, the nature of self-representation, and, in Sidonie Smith's phrase, "the textualization of the signature."[2] As traditional notions of selfhood disperse, at least among literary and cultural critics, the "mimetic hypothesis"[3] at the core of autobiographical (critical) discourse is abandoned. William C. Spengemann, for example, notes that "the connections between autobiography and what it appears to describe have become increasingly problematical, and the differences between autobiography and other written forms correspondingly indistinct, until there no longer seems to be anything that either is or is not autobiography."[4] Post-structuralist dismantlings of selfhood, author/ity and extra-textual truth and meaning accordingly propel the formerly marginal genres of self-narration into the center of critical inquiry.[5]

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[2]Sidonie Smith, "Self, Subject, and Resistance: Marginalities and Twentieth-Century Autobiographical Practice," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 9 (Spring 1990), 17.
[3]See Earl Miner, "Literary Diaries and the Boundaries of Literature," *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, 21 (1972), 48.
[4]William C. Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 188.
[5]See Domna Stanton, ed., *The Female Autograph* (New York: New York Literary Forum, 1984), p. 11.

Women-authored journals occupy a particularly provocative position within the destabilization of metaphysical notions of self-presence. Though studies like *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*[6]—among them George Gusdorf's 1956 essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" (in Olney, pp. 28-46)—placed autobiography on the map of literary criticism, feminist scholars from Estelle Jelinek[7] to Sheri Benstock[8] have pointed to the privileging of formal autobiography and male representative selfhood in the criticism of self-narratives. As Susan Stanford Friedman observes in her essay in *The Private Self*, Gusdorf's "description of a culture *without* the necessary preconditions for autobiography is uncannily akin to the marginalized cultures of women." With the fracturing of "the white, male story," however, and with their positional alterity, unauthorized voices open up and investigate generic margins and new representational spaces (Smith, p. 18). Contemporary criticism on autobiography is, in consequence, turning from "the selfhood of the father" (Smith, p. 13) and linear autobiographical unity to forms committed to polyvalence, fluidity and fragmentation: diaries, scrapbooks, letters. This critical preoccupation with traditionally feminine genres has helped pave the way for (re)publication of previously forgotten manuscripts, often written by women. Little accustomed and therefore little inclined to " 'construct meaning' on a grand scale," Germaine Brée argues, women are better positioned "to see beyond the constraints of our conceptional representations, beyond our dichotomies and abstractions . . . and to look to 'the multiplicity of the real'."[9]

Southern women's diaries are still awaiting the critical limelight, which has lingered on socially, historically, literarily or religiously prominent figures—Golda Meir, Margaret Cavendish, Virginia Woolf, or Margery Kempe, to name just a few. Yet the South is fertile ground for self-narration. Long off-center in relation to literary establishments, the South engendered writings within "intimate" genres not immediately linked to publication processes. Furthermore, the rich texture of Southern history, most notably the Civil War, transformed ladies otherwise ineligible for or indisposed towards writing into eye-witnesses of historical changes that disrupted their lives and prompted their jour-

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[6]James Olney, ed. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).
[7]*The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present* (Boston: Twayne, 1986).
[8]In *The Private Self: Theory and Practice of Women's Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Sheri Benstock (London: Routledge, 1988).
[9]Germaine Brée, "Autogynography," *Southern Review*, 22 (Spring 1986), 227.

nals.[10] Eudora Welty locates the region's predilection for autobiography in Southerners' desire to "place everybody" and also points to stable, tightly knit kinship and community structures. Asked by an interviewer in 1988 "what else in southerners might encourage them to write about themselves," Welty answers: "It's entertaining when it's done well. It helps you get a narrative sense of continuity when there are so many stories through the generations—something that connects people together."[11] Her words hold true, literally, for some of the women diarists of my title. Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas's journal is edited by her great-granddaughter Virginia Ingraham Burr; Magnolia Wynn Le Guin's by her grandson Charles A. Le Guin, and Floride Clemson's diary and letters, by Ernest McPherson Lander, Jr., and Charles N. McGee, Jr., present and former faculty of Clemson University. Their institution stands on the property of Floride's maternal grandfather, John C. Calhoun, a bequest to the foundation of Clemson Agricultural College by her father, Thomas G. Clemson. Linked to their subject by ties of kin or community, the editors seem motivated not just by scholarly interest and zeal but, like journal-keepers themselves, by a search for origins and a desire for self-discovery

When Ella Gertrude Clanton of Augusta, Georgia, began her diary in 1848, however, she was "performing a ritual of the elite" (p. 19), designed to refine her stylistic and feminine graces and to preserve the high points in the life of a privileged Southern belle: début, courtship, and wedding. "I wore my white satin," she writes in a perfunctory description of her coming-out party in January 1852:

> There were near three hundred invitations issued. That morning I received a letter from Jule Thomas. I enjoyed myself very much that night. It is scarcely worth while writing anything concerning the party as the occurrences (some of them at least) are too indelibly impressed upon memory ever to be effaced—I went in to the supper table with Mr. Thomas. (p. 97)

Though Mr. Thomas seems to Gertrude "*very* pleasant and agreeable" (p. 97), her marriage to him in December 1852 began the spiral of downward mobility that characterized her adult life. Jefferson Thomas abandoned his medical studies to become a planter at the Belmont property

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[10]See Steven Kagle, *Early Nineteenth-Century American Diary Literature* (Boston: Twayne, 1986), pp. 2, 64.

[11]Susan Wolff, "Some Talk About Autobiography: An Interview with Eudora Welty," *Southern Reader*, 2, (Summer 1990), 58.

outside Augusta, a wedding present from Gertrude's generous and beloved father, Turner C. Clanton. Already before the Civil War, however, Jeff Thomas demonstrated little business acumen and, unbeknownst to his wife, incurred numerous debts to in-laws and acquaintances. After the war, the Thomases lost their investment in slaves as well as C$15,000 worth of Confederate bonds. Jeff Thomas's retail business, established during the war, failed.

This bankruptcy and the publicly advertised sale of the inventory headed a series of sheriff's sales and auctions necessitated by Mr. Thomas's heavy debts, which gradually deprived Gertrude of all inherited property and forced her to become the family breadwinner. From 1878-84, she taught in a room at the farmhouse where the Thomases had taken up residence after a fire destroyed Belmont. Upon her mother's death in 1884, Gertrude moved with her family to Augusta and ran a boardinghouse. The last section of *The Secret Eye* tells of Gertrude's bouts of illness in these further reduced circumstances, as well as of a series of earthquakes, descriptions that contribute to the atmosphere of instability and doom in the last pages of the journal. From the mid-1880s, Gertrude was nonetheless active in religious and literary organizations in Augusta, as well as in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. After she and her husband moved in with their physician son Julian in Atlanta in 1893, Gertrude continued her public activities, both in the WCTU and in the National American Woman Suffrage Association, of which she became a life member in 1903. At her death in 1907, she had, in the words of Nell Irwin Painter, in the introduction to Thomas's diary, "become a full-fledged feminist whose stature was recognized throughout her state and region" (p. 19).

Gertrude Thomas's diary is interesting not only because it dramatizes—literally and symbolically—the fall of the Old South, but because its author is a rarely sensitive and gifted woman and writer. From a journal in which a spoiled, leisured belle records her dress, her visits and social conquests in a factual, enumerative manner, *The Secret Eye* becomes a reflective document motivated by a desire to preserve family history and by a longing for a confidant amidst financial and marital troubles. More importantly, however, the diary serves as an experimental space, in which Gertrude Thomas, much like Virginia Woolf, records her literary hopes and ambitions and tries out various writing strategies. She publishes, for example, a description of Jefferson Davis first written in her journal; she also turns to her diary for suitable

material on gardening and nature to submit to local magazines. Throughout *The Secret Eye*, Gertrude Thomas's impulse toward writing is inseparable from her preoccupation with region and gender. She longs for Southern literary attainments and even welcomes loss and ruin if a Southern literary culture might emerge from the ashes:

> Perhaps when we are reduced to poverty we may by the spur of adversity be led to throw aside the indolence which is the bane of a Southern people and develop what latent talent may exist among us. That the Northern people are more intellectual and capable of writing better than the people of the South I do not believe—It is only that they are more accustomed to the routine and mechanical part of writing . . . (p. 211)

Gertrude Thomas's own contributions to a Southern writing tradition are nonetheless, she believes, hampered by gender inequality. Like other women diarists, she complains of noise and interruptions from her surroundings and dreams of a room of her own (p. 219). Even the Civil War becomes a distraction from the intellectual life she craves: "I may perhaps be glad hereafter that I have lived through this war but now the height of my ambition is to be *quiet*, to have no distracting cares—the time to read—leisure to think and write—and study" (p. 257)

Floride Clemson experienced the war from a younger woman's perspective, yet shared—if only superficially—Gertrude Thomas's exasperation with the disruptions of war-time. "Oh these are dreadful times to live in. I suppose we may expect raids now any day, & God only knows how we are to bear it . . . ," she writes in April 1865 (p. 81). Born in 1842, Floride was the granddaughter of John C. Calhoun and the youngest child of Calhoun's favorite daughter, Anna, and Thomas Green Clemson, chargé d'affaires to Belgium during much of Floride's childhood. In June 1853, the family took up residence outside Bladensburg, Maryland, and christened their new place "The Home." Here, Anna and Floride spent most of the war, while Thomas Clemson, believing himself under suspicion for pro-Confederate activities, departed for the South with his son Calhoun in the summer of 1881. From January 1863 to October 1866, Floride produced 122 diary pages—some written during her trip north to Pennsylvania, Niagara Falls, Saratoga, New York City, and back; some at "The Home"; and some at her grandmother's property, "Mi Casa," in Pendleton, South Carolina.

After the war and the close of her diary, Floride contracted pneumonia, but despite chronic inflammation of the lungs, she recovered

sufficiently to marry the much older Gideon Lee of New York in 1869. Floride Isabella Lee was born the following May, but Floride Clemson did not live to raise her daughter: she died in July 1871 and was buried in Carmel. Like the many diaries of young girls and women discussed by Jane DuPree Begos, Floride's published journal and letters thus serve as a memorial, as "the tangible record of a life cut short."[12] In addition, *A Rebel Came Home* depicts the war-time existence of a well-bred, aristocratic belle and the function of writing and correspondence in the socialization of Southern ladyhood.

Floride's diary, which lacks the analytical maturity of most of Thomas's *The Secret Eye*, reads in places like a social calendar, in which the author registers the comings and goings of fashionable society in Bladensburg or Pendleton: "Went to the Woods on my way back from Wash., but saw only Emily, the others being away. Drove into the city with Dr. King, saw Cecilia Riggs, (Kate, & Alice are in England), Mrs. Dr. Stone, & did some more shopping" (p. 71). Floride includes in her diary long lists of "the families we know here" (pp. 85 ff) and of her personal jewelry, of which "the better part" characteristically covers three printed pages (pp. 109-112). Her fondness for lists originates, no doubt, in a desire for control through writing—a mantra staving off feelings of doubt, fear and confusion. "We scarcely ever see a news paper, & are bewildered groping in impenetrable darkness, & mystery," she writes in May 1865. Yet Floride is enthusiastic about witnessing events of historical significance, which she records for her "future self" (p. 83). Her writing, in fact, reveals her youthful adaptability: "Matters are pretty quiet now except casual disturbances thefts & murders" (p. 96). Indeed, Floride's phraseology indicates a charmingly youthful suspension between past and future, between formality and informality—in short, between girlhood and womanhood. She practices in her journal the registers of religious and female culture, for example when commenting on her grandmother's death (p. 109), or when departing from Saratoga because "we were not delighted there" (p. 39). She further seeks membership in the aristocratic women's culture by stressing letters written and received, and by recording births, weddings, deaths and burials in her circle. But Floride's language occasionally resists or escapes the genteel model. Hyperbolic slang expressions such as "Kate nearly had a fit," "I was nearly wild," and relatives "roasting" her with care sprinkle Floride's pages, as

[12]Jane DuPree Begos, "The Diaries of Adolescent Girls," *Women's Studies International Forum*, 10, no. 1 (1987), 69.

do references to individuals within host families as an "oaf," an "opposssam," and an "idiot, almost" (p. 101). Despite linguistic transgressions, Floride's diary functions as a passport to the refined femininity represented by Anna Clemson, whose monitoring role clearly emerges from the mother-daughter correspondence concluding *A Rebel Came Home.*

The notion of feminine perfection dominates the daybook that Margaret Sloan began on New Year's Day of 1900 and is partly responsible for the marital disaster recorded in *The Shattered Dream.* The daughter of a Chattanooga physician, Margaret had met Willard Leland in New York, a machinist apprentice, at the Epsworth League Hospital, where he was recovering from typhoid fever after having enlisted in the U.S. Army during the Spanish-American War. When the war ended before Willard saw combat, he returned to his apprenticeship in Knoxville, and the couple continued the romance through correspondence and visits. On the first page of Margaret's diary, Willard gets Dr. Sloan's permission to marry his daughter, and six months into the journal, Margaret's dreamed-of wedding takes place. Instead of the perfect union she considers her just reward for fulfilling the cultural role of Southern belle, however, Margaret finds her marriage characterized by loneliness, lack of attention, boarding-house flirtations and/or infidelities, and, eventually, separation. During the months from November 1901 to August 1902, Margaret is back in Chattanooga after a quarrel with Willard's family, but as the diary closes, she has decided to re-join her husband in the North. As Harold Woodell notes in his introduction, "her success or failure as a woman was judged by how well the marriage worked" (p. 4), and Margaret had little inclination for public degradation.

The Southern bride-to-be wished in her journal to preserve the year of the Great Event of her life. She faithfully sticks to her wedding on June 27, 1900, as the structural focus of her diary: before the ceremony, she counts months, weeks, days, and hours to the moment she will become Mrs. Leland; she repeats the description of the wedding ceremony three times in the journal; and regularly counts the weeks and months from this hour of bliss during her subsequent period of declining marital happiness. As the ideal gives way to the real, however, Margaret's motivation for writing changes. She uses her journal as a confidant—to vent anger and frustration, to hold back loneliness, and to plot for victory. But in the end, the daybook has become a memorial to grief

and suffering only and must be left behind if Margaret is to begin life with Willard anew.

Margaret's language nonetheless reveals that the romantic script she wanted to live still controls her imagination. She perceives in her future only the options of love or death and offers the clichés of sentimental fiction as a testimonial to her inability to transcend cultural stereotypes. I am quoting at some length from Margaret's last entry, dated August 21, 1902:

> I will leave this record of my life from the time he asked my Parents consent to our marriage up to this the beginning of a new life with him, here with Gertie, and if the old troubles come back, the old pain *fills my heart to bursting*, and they hear I am dead, I don't want them to dream a day that I am gone, they may weep for the bitterness of the years I dreamed were to be full of brightness, but never regret that I am beyond the power to feel such agony as only those experience who have trodden the stony path, whose every hope has vanished, and every dream faded. (p. 220; Margaret's italics)

The pat metaphors that flow from Margaret's pen might also, however, serve as obfuscation. As Judy Nolte Lensink suggests, the sentimentalizations of nineteenth-century women's prose of loss "perhaps employ metaphor to stop raw emotion from pouring out onto the page."[13]

On August 18, 1902, three days before Margaret Sloan was attempting in her closing entry to control the feelings of bitterness and despair that would impede her marital reconciliation, Magnolia Wynn Le Guin of Henry County, Georgia, described the conditions under which she had to fulfill her craving for writing:

> I have had to write like fighting fire, in extreme haste—baby crying so hard as it could and now he is in my lap while I am finishing up this. I'm doing hard work worrying myself almost helpless every day with baby and trying between his naps to do all the work I can. I am doing the work of 2 strong negroes and no health and strength. Baby wiggles so I can't write. (p. 47)

Like innumerable other farm existences, the world of Magnolia Le Guin was circumscribed by and confined to home and family. Born in 1869 in Monroe (now Lamar) County, Georgia, Magnolia spent her entire life within a thirty-mile radius of her birthplace, isolated in the rural,

[13]Judy Nolte Lensink, "Expanding the Boundaries of Criticism: The Diary as Female Autobiography," *Women's Studies*, 14, no. 1 (1987), 41.

white, agrarian community where she raised eight children. Her husband, Ghu, eked out a subsistence living from cotton, corn, grain, and livestock, while Magnolia spent her days indoors, a "home-concealed" woman staggering under immense loads of work and responsibilities, which in addition to her many children included the care of aged parents, endless visitors, cooking, sewing, ironing and performing her daily chores without running water or steady help. Magnolia's most distinguishing feature was, however, her need and yearning to write, which compelled her to keep sometimes two simultaneous journals under circumstances that would have daunted less motivated diarists.

The "autobiographical energy" and "individual accent"[14] of Magnolia's diaries stem in part from her writing enthusiasm, which repeatedly results in outbursts such as "I am so *hungry*, so impatient to write" (p. 165), but also from her style, which reflects the poetic monotony of her existence. In a sort of pre-Stein fashion, Magnolia captures through repetition with variation (occasionally by describing one day in two separate diaries) the slow-moving, continuous woman's present she is living. Her linguistic interests come out in the diaries' tracing of the Le Guin children's language acquisition, and of their progress in spelling, reading, and writing. Possibly unconscious metaphors such as "home" and the "overtaxed" female body form a design in the deceptively simple immersion characteristic of Magnolia's diary entries, and further contribute to the subtle rebellion discernible in her writing. Characteristically, Magnolia demonstrates with the withholding or outpouring of language her sympathies and concerns. Her constant fatigue, for example, is beyond language ("Can't express it" [p. 43]) and thus uncalled for, as are her many childbirths, which she also protests with silence. She doesn't name her fourth child for many months, and likewise refers to pregnancies soon before confinement, if at all. In contrast, she lavishes narrative energy on events of great joy and significance to her, such as her old mother's unexpected recovery from mortal sickness (p. 86), or little Mary's sunny disposition. Magnolia here employs what Lensink calls "diary time," a controlling device signalling intensity of experience by "quantity of language" (p. 42). Her self-coined phrases, most notably "home-concealed," and her use of dialect contribute to the charm and vivacity of the diaries in which Magnolia herself found her "sweetest pleasure and only pasttime [sic]" (p. 148).

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[14]See Robert Fothergill, *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 34.

All four women—Gertrude Thomas, Floride Clemson, Margaret Sloan, and Magnolia Le Guin—additionally offer to their readers a richly textured insight into issues such as woman's search for identity, labor, race, religion, woman's body and sexuality, and the spoken and unspoken codes delineating the lives of white, Christian women, whether aristocratic or working-class, in the Victorian and early twentieth-century South. Not least interesting are the secrets deliberately kept from the diarists' imagined audience but implied by what Painter labels "leakage" entries and "deception clues" (p. 56): the alcoholism of Jefferson Thomas and his possible sexual relations and offspring with slave women; the miserliness and irascibility of Floride Clemson's distinguished father. Despite the seeming immediacy and simplicity of the diary form, the four journal writers practice the censorship, selection and design characteristic of fiction and accordingly invite the de-coding and de-construction previously reserved for mainstream literary genres. The editors of the diaries and writers of the introductions to the four volumes (especially Nell Irwin Painter, Harold Woodell and Ursula Le Guin) all contribute importantly to this work.

If, as Robert A. Fothergill asserts, "no editor can be trusted not to spoil a diary" (p. 4), the editors of *The Secret Eye*, *A Rebel Came Home*, *The Shattered Dream*, and *A Home- Concealed Woman* have been gentle vandals. Most of them have limited themselves to identifying people and places, correcting careless, but not idiosyncratic misspellings, and providing notes and appendices. Virginia Ingraham Burr, the editor of Gertrude Thomas's 450,000 words in the original manuscript diary, undoubtedly faced the most agonizing task. With any reader interested in, say, representations of the body, intertextuality, education, and female networks, she regrets her deletions of "commentary on books, sermons, and scripture passages," as well as "many entries dealing with clothes, parties, shopping, college, and the constant visiting among friends and relatives" (p. xi). But despite the editor's quest for plot and unity, the diary of Ella Gertrude Thomas shines indomitably through century-old layers of dust and demonstrates, like the journals of Clemson, Sloan and Le Guin, the gem-like endurance of Southern women's lives and spirits.

ESSAY-REVIEW

HAROLD MCSWEEN

Alexandria, Louisiana

The Vanderbilt Commodores

The Vanderbilt Tradition: Essays in Honor of Thomas Daniel Young, edited by Mark Royden Winchell. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991. $39.95; *Gone with the Ivy: A Biography of Vanderbilt University*, by Paul K. Conkin, assisted by Henry Lee Swint and Patricia Miletich. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985. $49.50.

> Folks say that I don't care about education, but it ain't true; I do. I've been among educated people enough to see its importance. I've been to England, and seen them lords, and other fellows, and knew that I had twice as much brains as they had maybe, and yet I had to keep still, and couldn't say anything through fear of exposing myself.
>
> —*Cornelius Vanderbilt*

> Keep no professor who is discontented with his salary or his situation—or whose family is so pronounced. For such, withdraw chairs, if they will not leave them by their own accord. This infection spreads; it makes disorders; it disaffects students. Be rid of them.
>
> —*Holland N. McTyeire*

> Of course the thing I got most out of Vanderbilt was to discover that literature was not a dead thing to be looked at through the glass of a museum case, but was very much alive.
>
> —*Cleanth Brooks*

> (In response.) That was dramatized for me when I was told that John Crowe Ransom, my freshman English teacher, was a poet and had published a book of poems.
>
> —*Robert Penn Warren*

> Ransom's move [to Kenyon College] broke the back of Vanderbilt's great English department, which for a few years had been the strongest College department ever assembled at Vanderbilt.
>
> —*Paul K. Conkin*

ONCE NORTH CAROLINA BEYOND THE MOUNTAINS, an eastern enclave of it once called the state of Franklin, Tennessee, occupies a wide parallelogramic expanse that slopes from the Appalachians to the Mississippi. During the late eighteenth century its flanks began to nurture

contrasting white cultures comparable to that of the Scottish Highlands and the Nile delta. In between, days away from either extremity, lay a southerly extension of Kentucky's rolling bluegrass hills: Middle Tennessee, which could have reminded of the unspoilt south of England. A crossroads dockage on the winding Cumberland, Nashville, became its capital in 1843 after native tribes had been removed to the Indian Territory, later Oklahoma. Tennessee, the sixteenth state, was admitted to the United States in 1796. Its centrality and width are confirmed by borders shared with eight states: Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina. If the American South be not perception, construct, myth but a regional reality, Tennessee itself consists of three regions other than large cities either cosmopolitan or industrial or both. It bridges the South's east and west—and its north beyond an arbitrary boundary.

Proposed Central University began to occupy the mind of Methodism that was divided in spirit about founding a university that might sap support for its scattered small colleges. Abolitionist American Methodism split as a denomination in 1844 over slavery within the South that it was not America's genius to abolish as did England through a financial rather than a military initiative. Tennessee became divided over secession: sectional sentiment pitted loyalist east against rebellious west; Middle Tennessee tipped the balance. The last to secede from the Union, Tennessee was the first Confederate state to gain readmittance. To corrupt a long story, perhaps not the first tale associated with Vanderbilt University to have been corrupted, the institution can be said to have been founded by determined Methodist Bishop Holland N. McTyeire in 1873, a year of epidemic cholera in Middle Tennessee, within a decade after the Confederate States of America had lost a war and vanished into legend. Within another decade the eleven states of this former nation would win the peace, banish occupation troops who did not prefer to stay and become Southerners, begin to reassert White Supremacy (a regime that inspired inhumane mob atrocities), witness the formulation of whatever it is that the American South would become that is more enduring and influential than had been the short-lived Confederacy. (Tourists visit to see what all remains of Old South relics: quite a lot; readers within and without enjoy fiction about the macabre and grotesque that is placed within its borders during the time of duels and hoopskirts of crinoline. Fiction writers of romance, history, and literary commentary hew to the time-proven formulas in prolonging the fascination that seems endless cream from a cash cow.)

During the three-quarters of a century following 1877 some members of a minority race might have perceived that they lived in a place comparable to a thousand-year *reich* until they would move north and west, where they gained a perspective that some Southerners did not have and where, too, a majority race joined in a collective sin: the same ethnic prejudice that has been practiced everywhere since the past has been recovered in history. McTyeire, a learned man for the times, demonstrated a dedication to see a university's fruition. To what extent he might have been concerned about violating the admonition about knowledge found in the second chapter of *Genesis* is but one of a number of unresolved philosophical questions that a great university provokes. Certain it is that Bishop McTyeire could not have dreamed that his inspiration would culminate in such resounding achievement any more than he could have anticipated flight, fission, philanthropy's future bureaucratization, two of which seemed to annoy the Nashville Agrarians during an aberrant interval of their productive lives.

Times of brooding darkness by day seem not propitious for starting anything within an impoverished desolation unless on faith, luck, or cheek. While in New York to see a physician the Bishop happened on the blind side of Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt, one of America's wealthiest robber barons, who would leave an estate valued in excess of a hundred millions dollars. A farmer's son and school dropout at eleven, the unchurched and aged Commodore had accumulated a transportation empire and married a young widow from Mobile: Mrs. McTyeire's widowed cousin and a distant relative of the late invalided Mrs. Vanderbilt. With blessings of the talented new Mrs. Vanderbilt, who had moved to New York to teach voice and music, a bishop persuaded a tycoon to ante up to the tune of a half-million up front and to promise more. It came to almost a million dollars in all. Who can deny that Vanderbilt University's founding was inspired by Christian love?

Subsequent benefactions from the Commodore's progeny of succeeding generations and from other concentrations of private wealth explain the survival and ultimate preeminence of a university unlikely to have been chartered with such generosity at the hub of former killing fields. Wealth, though, has ever patronized learning, illuminated nights for scholars. Neither wealth or learning should be underestimated—nor religion either. Their accommodation one with another is another matter. Churches ever have founded universities only

to lose them to scholars. Wealth ever has subsidized learning that has been seen as inimical to both wealth and religion. Learning and religion ever have encouraged the idea of progress and hope for mankind's amelioration, but its spokesmen have complained about its price and unfamiliar mien, if recognized, when it appeared. Religion, wealth, learning: they fuse as a trinity of conflicting but cooperating influences that have informed the mind of the person that possesses a knowledge of both good and evil and the capacity for engaging in both. Although the purpose of these two essential books about "Vanderbilt" is not to address underlying evils that have pervaded the South since the Civil War, such as ignorance, nativism, chauvinism, anti-intellectualism, which also pervade everywhere else, they make a valuable contribution to an understanding of the good of Vanderbilt University and of one of its ingrown traditions. Yankee wealth and Dixie sacrifice have subsidized a university with a split personality that through its diverse functions that show cross purposes one from another in separate buildings on the same campus has subscribed both to the idea of progress and to preservation of tradition and bucolic ideals. Most persons everywhere, not realizing it, always have embraced these fetching contradictions. Pity it is that mankind of every era suffers illusions to inspire arguing the inevitable, for reinventing ancient wheels. Benefactors of all persuasions and illusions saw merit in Vanderbilt University's authoritarian leadership that insisted on academic excellence at a time when elsewhere, north and south, a high academic standard was but a creed placed in brochures. Nashville would see itself as a new Athens; others would see it as Babel.

Vanderbilt has spawned rich traditions in arts, athletics, education, engineering, law, letters, nursing, religion, science. Its literary tradition, as today's generation knows it, was founded by John Crowe Ransom, a poet-philosopher who was the son and grandson of Methodist ministers, although it was to an established Vanderbilt University of a deserved literary and classical reputation that the fifteen-year-old Ransom matriculated in 1903 as an honor graduate of Bowen School, whose headmaster held a Vanderbilt diploma. The university's high academic standards had created a need for private prep schools, a tradition in Middle Tennessee Sawney Webb had begun before McTyeire began classes at his new university. That in time Vanderbilt parted from its Methodist beginnings and Ransom from his Methodist heritage is not novel or inconsequential, nor are the two departures unrelated. It was through the pain of internal struggle that both the institution and the

man fashioned their achievements and failures. The university has become renowned, Ransom its literary icon par excellence (even if not its "Bear" Bryant, who once coached as a Vanderbilt assistant) who is beginning to be forgotten and supplanted by another icon, Robert Penn Warren, whose connection with Vanderbilt was the shorter and lesser. Methodism informed both the university and Ransom with an influence that has not run its course in shaping a region's culture that is less erudite than evangelical, less evangelical than libertine and violent, not as high church as today's Methodist Church. What Tennessean in the year 1873 could have anticipated such evolution and influence of evolution?

Appropriate it is that a festschrift honors Ransom's biographer, Thomas Daniel Young,[1] a retired chaired professor in Vanderbilt's English department that once he chaired at a time long after Ransom's departure. It is the work of many of Young's students, including its editor Mark Royden Winchell, who has appropriated for it a valuable title that is both appropriate and approximate, as he acknowledges in his introduction.[2] The title could be used for books observing the university's other great traditions. A history of Vanderbilt called a biography has been written by the university's Distinguished Professor of History Paul K. Conkin. It achieves the purpose of biography, the genre of ancients who wrote hagiography of kings, the genre of moderns who study the self of heroes and antiheroes. Conkin penetrates the self of a university with the skill of a versatile trained historian, shows restraint in not writing hagiography of either an institution or of its heroes. According to their lights, the essayists in Young's encomium have penetrated the self of an English department by replacing some old heroes with new heroes. That some essayists show a tendency toward hagiography, interpretation of the past that might find more acceptance in Middle Tennessee than in Middle America and that shows loyalty of old grads and old boys does not diminish its value for comprehending a mindset with

[1]Thomas Daniel Young, *Gentleman in a Dustcoat: A Biography of John Crowe Ransom* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976).

[2]In his letter of October 12, 1991, to this essayist Winchell accounts for selecting the title by noting that all but two of the essays focused on persons who had been either Vanderbilt students or faculty members. One of the other two, John Gould Fletcher, was a Fugitive, Agrarian, and Imagist. The other subject, Faulkner, is treated to reflect its author's perception of the difference between Faulkner and the Agrarians. "The term 'Vanderbilt Tradition' was the only one broad enough to include the Fugitives, Agrarians, and Southern New Critics along with the later generations influenced by them . . . what we are speaking of is only incidentally a Vanderbilt tradition."

which literary elsewhere are familiar if not in agreement. These Vanderbilt studies of uncommon forthrightness provide comparison of how a historian and literary scholars (and a political scientist) chronicle some of the same past of Vanderbilt's intramural and intercollegiate struggles that have attracted national attention and have generated works of literary scholarship enough to annoy administrators who consider budgets of great libraries such as Nashville's Joint University Library. The books contain new information enough to encourage the scholarship, including disagreement, of a rising generation of Southern scholars who, knowing it or not, have been influenced by Vanderbilt since high school—and are indebted to Ransom and his disciples for seeing works of literature in a light that had not shone in the American university before Ransom lit it in Nashville. A chain of related literary movements gains attention in both books.

One of its links, Agrarianism, evokes curiosity among those not in agreement with a party line that once was the view of the so-called Nashville-Baton Rouge-Old South Agrarian axis, to use the words of C. Vann Woodward.[3] Conkin has drawn on the works of Chancellor James H. Kirkland, Edwin Mims, Madison Sarratt, Henry Lee Swint and on the assistance of Patricia S. Miletich to portray Vanderbilt University in twenty-four chapters. One chapter, "Fugitives and Agrarians," finds its counterpart in the festschrift's introductory essay by Winchell, who, unlike Conkin, finds that the Agrarian movement was not a chauvinistic abandonment of Southern modernism but a different version of the same sensibility that had animated Fugitive poetry. Winchell's rationale is worth a trip to the library if not also the price of the book, although agreement with Winchell on this complexity is not urged by this older devotee of the lower end of that axis who never farmed or eschewed automobiles, jet planes, riding lawn mowers, but who does confess computer illiteracy and thus understands Allen Tate at his most frenetic unpredictability.[4] Conkin's favorable mention of the New Criticism as one of the few intellectual innovations at Vanderbilt is a matter delineated in the straight-talking lead essay by George Core. Both Winchell and Core studied in Vanderbilt's English department after the Sec-

[3]C. Vann Woodward, *Looking Back* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), p. 18.

[4]For other and comprehensive accounts of the Agrarians, see Fred Hobson, *Tell About the South: The Southern Rage to Explain* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), pp. 180-243; and Daniel Joseph Singal, *The War Within* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 198-260.

ond World War after all heroes but Donald Davidson had left. That Core took his doctorate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill adds a dimension for those who see the two universities as adversaries in the Agrarian controversy and for the tradition of the two universities as being seen, respectively, as conservative and liberal. Although grown in Piedmont soil, the university at Chapel Hill, a state institution founded almost a century earlier than was Vanderbilt, endured most of the same strife that Conkin recounts, particularly that involving the tension between fundamentalist religion and academic inquiry and a rift about social outreach.

It is Vanderbilt's resistance to change that Conkin sees as extreme among American universities. Old men, he says, held a preponderance of power until retirement. Vanderbilt clung to older pedagogies and academic tradition, a view held in common by Conkin, Winchell, and Core. It resisted change, avoided fashion while holding to the integrity of a high standard. Vanderbilt's location in a prosperous Southern city in a region of an elusive culture Conkin finds unique. He identifies it with the Confederate South, a regional self-consciousness, a deep-rooted sense of inferiority, consciousness of rank or status, a craving for acceptance or certification. It was out of this milieu of defeat, devastation, occupation, reaction to reconstruction, fundamentalism, private prep schools that taught the trivium and the classics and that were better than some colleges, absence of schools, and a straight-laced university that flowered a unique literary tradition. Whatever the eventual assessment of the connection between the Fugitive and Agrarian movements and of the New Criticism, many persons beyond the South will agree that an exception to a traditional mindset throughout American academia was the innovative view of teaching literature, especially poetry, that Ransom brought to the Vanderbilt English department. He had found it while prospecting along the Thames as a Rhodes Scholar on winds blown from Cambridge University, where literary criticism had become the interest of I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis, William Empson. As Core shows, before Ransom's time literary criticism had not been taught in any American university; before 1919 modern English was not recognized as a course of study at Cambridge.

Although Ransom, a philosopher who had not majored in English as a Vanderbilt undergraduate, introduced criticism upon his return as a member of its English faculty, he did not call it the New Criticism. Literary journalists named it after Ransom had left Nashville. It was not

at Vanderbilt that the work of the Vanderbilt New Critics gained recognition. They blanketed American academia with a new method of teaching literature. Two of Ransom's disciples, Cleanth Brooks and Warren, took it with them to Louisiana State University in the early 1930s not long before LSU, as the pride of education-minded Huey Long, had become the thirteenth largest American university and the ninth largest state university at a time when other universities were not hiring apprentice instructors of English but retrenching. There they became founders and editors of the *Southern Review* in 1935, wrote *Understanding Poetry* (1938) and *Understanding Fiction* (1943), which became popular textbooks in many colleges and universities. For another view of the New Criticism consider that of Brooks himself.[5]

Ransom in 1937, according to Conkin, burned out from Agrarian advocacy, 1931 to 1936, after floundering in the complexity and ambiguity of economic policy, realized as the Great Depression began to wane that he had backed another lost cause. He left Vanderbilt for Kenyon College, where he founded and edited the *Kenyon Review* and made his greatest impact as a literary critic. Without Ransom, Conkin notes, although Vanderbilt's English department remained strong and without equal in the College of Arts and Science, it lost its prominence: not so much in scholarship as in poetry, criticism, creative writing; and only Davidson remained from the coterie of Fugitives and Agrarians to maintain the tradition. Core and other essayists collected by Winchell supplement Conkin's account of the university's literary aspect not in full agreement as to a decline. Core sees it that Ransom left Vanderbilt owing to his work's not having been appreciated there either by Kirkland or Mims as English department chair. Conkin thinks that Ransom, also beleaguered by many administrative tasks, was determined to leave and could not have been enticed to remain. Judging from the presence of so many Vanderbilt-schooled English scholars on faculties of prominent universities, including those among the essayists, Conkin's and Core's concern may be unwarranted. Conkin seems to wonder whether criticism is as important as Core thinks it is. Core believes that the critic, not the scholar, discovers a form of art (in context with a quote from Warren) and reveals the life within, which is one of the several views among literary scholars about teaching literature and shaping the English curriculum that has come to include many specialties and subspecialties other than criticism: literary history, comparative literature,

[5]Cleanth Brooks, "In Search of the New Criticism," *American Scholar*, 53 (1983), 41-53.

and literature of nations, regions of nations, epochs, cultures, cults. Not only has the New Criticism been made the subject of evaluative controversy; criticism per se does not enjoy the vogue that once it did in the wake of seminal work done by the Cambridge critics, the Vanderbilt critics, T. S. Eliot, R. P. Blackmur, many others in other nations. Other concepts of literary analysis, not including literary journalism of pedestrian quality that displays prose not worthy of scholars, are the occasional rage: something new, useful or not, although the axis cited from Woodward has not shown innovation in criticism since the work of Ransom, Brooks, and Warren.

McTyeire guided the university until his death in 1889. That it survived is a miracle that would have revealed itself during the prudent forty-four-year tenure of Kirkland (as chancellor), who organized the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools and served until the summer of 1937. Conkin sees Kirkland as the most influential person in Vanderbilt's history and believes that he remains its central figure. Kirkland was followed by Oliver C. Carmichael (1937-1946), Harvie Branscomb (1946-1963), and George Alexander Heard (1963-1946). Joe B. Wyatt has served as chancellor since Heard's retirement. Heard, as Conkin relates, came to Vanderbilt from Chapel Hill, where he had become dean of the Graduate School. He had matriculated to Chapel Hill in 1934 at a time, Conkin reminds, when of all Southern universities Chapel Hill was the most open, pluralistic, intellectually vibrant—and, it can be observed here, while the liberal-minded innovative and controversial Frank P. Graham was serving as president (and officing on the Chapel Hill campus). Heard, a political scientist, had earned a doctorate at Columbia University, and had learned much about the South while at the University of Alabama as an assistant to V. O. Key when Key was writing *Southern Politics* (1949). He had served as president of the Southern Political Science Association while a member of the Chapel Hill faculty. The selection of Heard as Vanderbilt's chancellor and the fact of Heard's long and successful tenure would seem to have reinscribed the so-called New South advocacy of Kirkland and to confirm the world view that had been the guiding influence all along of governance and administration of the university, including during the time of the Agrarian aberration that has drawn the attention of so many Southern literary scholars and doctrinal political conservatives everywhere—and the ridicule of others in a majority beyond the Nashville-Baton Rouge-Old South Agrarian axis. (Whether, as some commentators believe, a tory view of literary scholars within the

Agrarian-minded coterie influenced a shaping of the Southern literary canon and their criticism after most of the Agrarians themselves [not their disciples who were writing essays and dissertations in support of *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), especially during the 1960s and again, it seems, in the 1990s when it began to appeal for reasons of current social concern] recanted and some of them became liberals again is beyond the scope if not the notice of this paper.)

For the festschrift Winchell has gathered a reunion of twenty Commodores and two others: Louis D. Rubin, Jr., who wrote the foreword, and Charlotte H. Beck, who wrote about the relationship between Randall Jarrell and Allen Tate. Winchell has divided the collection into four sections: "Modernism and Beyond," "The Myths We've Lived," "Tradition and Traditionalism," "Keepers of the Rite." Other contributors are Kieran Quinlan (on Ransom and Robert Graves), Martha E. Cook ("Allen Tate and the Jazz Age"), William Pratt (on John Gould Fletcher), M. E. Bradford (on Davidson), Monroe K. Spears (on James Dickey), Earl J. Wilcox (on Warren), Wayne Batten (on Jesse Hill Ford), Jerry Elijah Brown (on Roy Blount), Elizabeth Sarcone (on Andrew Lytle), William C. Havard,the political scientist (on Richard M. Weaver), A. E. Elmore (on Faulkner), Carol M. Andrews (on Brooks on Faulkner), M. Thomas Inge (on Davidson), Ruel Foster, who taught Young (on Jesse Stuart and Davidson), Herschel Gower (on Randall Stewart and Richmond Croom Beatty), Lloyd Davis (on Edwin Godsey), and Lance Lyday (Young's bibliography). Winchell also contributed an essay on Warren's *Brother to Dragons*. The collection qualifies as a varsity performance.

Some traditions survive; others wane; most disappear. Vanderbilt University, like other distinguished seats of learning erected since mankind's dark age, stands as a tradition that illuminates within the range of its beacon a traditional void of innate and perplexing tenacity. Why does the intellectual attitude possess such a small number? (Anybody reading this journal: count your blessings.) A mission never perishes, only some of its faithful. Science, the humanities, the arts, athletics: all have lifted mankind. Wasn't it when at Vanderbilt scholarship in the humanities was pollinated by inspiration from the arts that there was rediscovered a gift from an ancient tradition associated with Aristotle? Was it, perhaps recovered by scholars who had been inspired by a classical education of an era past of a kind rare to be offered today? If so, what does this portend for a literary tradition and Vanderbilt too? Such is part of the legend that Conkin spreads before us and

that Winchell, Core, Spears, Havard, Foster, and the other contributors to a festschrift in honor of a worthy scholar are seeking to define. Two admirable books are worthy of a university that almost did not germinate in the prostrate South of 1873 and that almost did not survive times of short crops and short tempers of bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The gesture to Young is extraordinary in a time of shorting superannuated academicians after a lifetime of sacrifice. From Mims to Young, from Ransom and Tate to Warren and Brooks—since the time of McTyeire and Kirkland—a new tradition evolved in Nashville to nourish a region almost as bereft as when a bishop captivated a man able to afford a yacht and a university too. Although machines abound, cholera has disappeared almost everywhere except in primitive lands of a subsistence agriculture.

BOOK REVIEWS

Author and Agent: Eudora Welty and Diarmuid Russell, by Michael Kreyling. New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1991. 210 pp. $22.95.

"I SUPPOSE YOU KNOW THE PARASITIC WAY an agent works taking 10% of the author's takings. He is rather a benevolent parasite because authors as a rule make more when they have an agent than when they do without one" (p. 9). This letter of May 28, 1940, written on the eve of the German occupation of France, was Diarmuid Russell's introduction to Eudora Welty, whose few stories he had read and admired enough to offer his services as agent. Welty surprised him by accepting his offer immediately and thus began a relationship that would last more than thirty years.

The easy mutuality that most characterizes this relationship, in the face of some very real differences of perspective and temperament, is present even in this first letter. Russell's casual self-deprecation is echoed by Welty's equally casual acceptance: "Yes—be my agent." Holding a story in one hand and Russell's letter in the other, she explains, "it seemed inevitable" (p. 23).

Thus far, the biographical material on Welty that does exist is sketchy, most in the form of interviews—the author's insistence on her privacy is well known—and so it is especially noteworthy that Welty herself made available to Michael Kreyling "several hundred letters" of her correspondence with Diarmuid Russell. She did so, characteristically, in an effort to ensure that her agent get his due—she was miffed when only "two scanty obituaries" followed his death in 1973 (pp. 3-4). But Michael Kreyling's aim is somewhat different, not to celebrate Russell, nor even to celebrate Welty, but "to let the correspondents' voices create a dialogue" about "*how* to communicate the material" of Welty's fiction (p. 4). He is most interested in what this relationship offers to our understanding of Welty's work. The result is not only a good read but a book rich in implications for Welty scholarship.

Diarmuid Russell was the son of the Irish poet A.E. Russell, an author Welty had admired since college days when *The Candle of Vision* helped her through a dark winter in Madison, Wisconsin. It must have made perfect sense that A.E.'s son should help her through the difficult early years when she was in danger of being overlooked as just another

"Southern" writer among the many other Southern writers who were hailing from the oasis below the Mason-Dixon line. It was Russell's "own mild obliviousness to the politics of writing as a Southerner" and his inherited faith in the ability of art to rise "above historical circumstances" that may have made a difference for Welty (p. 18), despite her much stronger sense of the relationships between text and context.

The first exploratory letters are the richest. During this first decade of their correspondence, the engagement of both author and agent with the material is intense, the dialogue fascinating for what it reveals about the formation of Welty's aesthetic and canon. It is never a question of the author growing alone into maturity and confidence, but always a matter of collaborations and rebellions. Their correspondence during these early years, which are not so coincidentally the years of World War II, is characterized by compatible, if differing, visions of the redemptive possibilities of art, visions shadowed in A.E.'s passionate post-World War I protest against "the mighty devils of state and empire" (p. 28).

It is not Michael Kreyling's purpose to explore the early correspondence between his author and agent within the context of war, but neither does he ignore the impact of that war and one cannot help noticing how much Welty, whose youngest brother was at Okinawa and whose friend John Fraiser Robinson was in U.S. Intelligence, was shaped as artist by its closeness to the emotional centers of her life. Beginning in 1942, she wrote battle reviews for the *New York Times Book Review* under the pen name of Michael Ravenna, but even her September 1940 account of the Free State of Jones in central Mississippi, whose inhabitants refused to fight in the Civil War because of the more immediate attractions of their own feud, and her description of the several other small towns where "it is downright dangerous to go" (p. 43) suggest an intriguing preoccupation with issues of autonomy, invasions upon the timeless, and the possibilities of endurance in the face of the violence of war. Certainly Welty's own imagination, during 1940 and 1941 when she was writing the fantasy that would become *The Robber Bridegroom* evinced a preoccupation with transgressions and defiances on the Natchez Trace, "beautiful and timeworn" (p. 52), and it was that "old trail" that would once again serve to hold together the stories of her second collection, *The Wide Net.*

It was at this time, Kreyling tells us, that Welty became aware of her work as "rebellion" (p. 82), or as she puts it in a 1942 letter to Russell:

"for me ideas must go far off into excursions of their own" (p. 92). The task, as she and Russell understood it, was to illuminate the obscurity of the interior, to link "the interior genius or intelligence" with the "exterior discipline and observation" (p. 57) without violating either. Russell advised her to "meditate" (p. 60) and to trust her own "intuitive judgement" (p. 68), but it was Mary Louise Aswell, the fiction editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, who identified Welty's aesthetic in terms of "latent female psychology and inner experience" (p. 69). Welty responded to Aswell's assessment of "The Winds," and not long after its acceptance by *Harper's Bazaar*, wrote a long letter to Russell in which she spoke of her work more articulately and at greater length than before. It was in this letter that she tried to explain the logic of "The Winds," or at least to express her surprise that the logic of Cornelia's letter being swept by the winds to the child was not clear:

> I wanted it to have that emphasis but as an object from without—it had to balance the whole story. You know how in a painting a required note of intensity or a certain unmixed color will be placed maybe on otherwise irrelevant material, as far as subject matter goes, for the sake of the whole composition—the final, compensating thing. Maybe the emphasis on the sign coming from without has lost its meaning (which concerned the commonplace & specified longing & grief to come) by being an actually worded letter, which might rightfully demand an explanation. (p. 70)

Russell wasn't having any. Emphasizing the "otherwise irrelevant" through a moment of intensity as "the final, compensating thing" struck him as dangerous: "The reasons must be there even if they cannot be explained to some ignorant idiot like myself" (p. 71). Kreyling suggests that Russell's interest in "controlled intention" might bear looking at in the context of A.E.'s aversion to "modern art" as practiced by Picasso and Cezanne, but here might also be some indication of Welty's own affinities with modernism. Certainly her own vision is remarkably and abstractly spatial. One has only to think of the perspectives,and perspectival disruptions, in stories like "Moon Lake" and "The Wide Net." And in her fascinating review of Virginia Woolf's *A Haunted House and Other Short Stories*, Welty aligns herself firmly with the possibilities of "the miracle beyond science, and illusion. . . . The miracle might after all come as accident, and might be a crude thing."[1]

Her agent's view of art is quite different. Both author and agent

[1]Eudora Welty, "Mirrors for Reality," *New York Times Book Review*, April 16, 1944, p. 3.

value "passion" and "heart," but, as Kreyling tells us, Russell's aesthetic is more mimetic (p. 150). For him as for his father the work of art seems hardly distinguishable from the individual artist; it is organic in its dependence upon "natural laws," the artist a "voice" through which the truth of art is shaped and formed in his (or her?) own image, the logic finally representational. Welty's vision is more focused on strategies of removal and artifice ("Mirrors," p. 3), more focused on the revelation than on the representation (p. 138). About symbols and her use of them in "The Burning," Welty wrote that "things are symbolic—not the author. A mirror's very nature is a symbol" (p. 152). Russell answered, many years later, with his characteristic emphasis on the *author* rather than on the *thing*, that talk about symbols "always gave him 'the willies'": "It exists but really unconscious of the writer, like a quality of voice" (p. 152).

These differences would generate some distress for Russell (and possibly some amusement for the reader of this book) when theatrical folk started pursuing *The Ponder Heart*, Welty's first major publication after *The Golden Apples*. Russell disliked the theater; in line with his interest in the individual artist's voice he preferred dealing with one human being at a time and felt somewhat out of his element where people came in "teams" and "companies" and projects were collaborative (p. 150)—one wonders what he would make of Kreyling's project. Nor did he have a great deal of trust for the ethics of theater people. Welty, however, loved the stage and the spectacle—for some of the same reasons that Russell disliked them:

> It was taken for granted that there wasn't any lying in our family, and I was advanced in adolescence before I realized that in plenty of homes where I played with schoolmates and went to parties, children lied to their parents and parents lied to their children and to each other. It took me a long time to realize that these very same everyday lies, and the stratagems and jokes and tricks and dares that went with them, were in fact the basis of the scenes I so well loved to hear about and hoped for and treasured in the conversation of adults.
>
> My instinct—my dramatic instinct—was to lead me, eventually, on the right track for a storyteller: the scene was full of hints, pointers, suggestions, and promises of things to find out and know about human beings.[2]

For Russell, however, the theater was, and would remain, "just the other end from philosophy which is always trying to find the eternal certain-

[2]Eudora Welty, *One Writer's Beginnings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), pp. 14-15.

ties; it is always finding delay, hesitation, uncertainty, replacements, and the Lord knows what. Hold on to your hat" (p. 178).

After the publication of *The Bride of the Innisfallen* in 1955, the quality of the correspondence changes, reflecting the changes in circumstances for both Welty and Russell. Russell suffered a heart attack in 1956, and Welty was beginning to be more and more occupied with the care of her mother and brothers. During this period, letters between author and agent become less focused on aesthetic matters, and more personal, with Russell repeatedly encouraging Welty to find time for her writing; and Welty answering hopefully but not often succeeding. Here the focus of the book shifts slightly, from the struggle with texts to the struggle with context, but there is so little known about that period and so little revealed in the correspondence that the reader is left with the uncomfortable feeling that a curtain has been dropped too early, or at least too quickly, on a developing drama.

By the time Welty began circulating material again, the publishing industry had been transformed into what one observer called "a fertile field for the manager" (p. 185). Old-fashioned editors like Russell seemed to have been swept aside, and when William Jovanovich joined Harcourt, Brace, Russell was troubled. His client had a new novel in process. Negotiating for its publication would be different. Other changes would be even more important. Medgar Evers was assassinated in Jackson in 1963. Welty stopped work on *Losing Battles* to write "Where is the Voice Coming From?" She was soon swept up in the responsibilities that went with being a writer, and especially a Southern writer, in the midst of the racial upheaval of the 1960s and began to grow concerned that *Losing Battles* would strike reviewers as "inconsequential" to the extent that it did not engage race (p. 203). Then the death of her mother and brother Walter in early 1966 left her unable to work for several months. When she returned to work, it was not on *Losing Battles*, for which everyone was waiting, but on a new story, "Poor Eyes," which would become "The Optimist's Daughter" when it was published by William Maxwell in the *New Yorker* in 1969. But at long last, *Losing Battles* was published—just as the author had written it, the terms that Russell insisted upon. It was a victory that equaled the early ones.

Russell lived only three years after the publication of *Losing Battles*, but he saw his client through the difficult early years and onto firm aesthetic as well as financial footing. In 1969, when he began to look into

the correspondence, he wrote to Welty that he "looked with amazement at the old cards and how many people and places turned your work down—and what they said. You remark that at Breadloaf the opinion was unanimous that nobody would want POWERHOUSE and that STORY was always writing 'This is almost it, but not quite.' They don't talk like this now" (p. 184). Part of the reason may be that Russell wouldn't let them; when William Jovanovich of Harcourt, Brace, the "proud Montenegrin" (p. 198), dared to suggest changes to *Losing Battles*, Russell took his client's business elsewhere.

The trouble with this book is that it makes the reader hungry for more—about Russell, about Welty, about the material, about the figures who enter the account and disappear all too quickly, more about everything that has to do with Eudora Welty's work. Because of the unusual focus on the development of the author's aesthetic sensibility through a limited correspondence, the scope is necessarily broadening at every moment to include scenes and people far removed from the authors of that correspondence, but if Kreyling is going to retain control of the limited material he has at his disposal, he must keep readjusting that scope, resisting implications and possibilities. Welty's extended visits to San Francisco constitute a case in point. Her literary friendships in San Francisco seem to have a great deal to do with the development of her art, but relatively little to do with Diarmuid Russell. Likewise, Katherine Anne Porter enters the book as an intriguing presence in the Welty/Russell correspondence, but quickly vanishes—as of course she must if Kreyling is going to maintain his emphasis on the Russell/Welty relationship. As it stands, however, the book is rich, well worth exploring, the very best so far of the biographical material available on Welty. Maybe this book is groundwork for a larger project. I hope so.

Emory University BARBARA LADD

Erskine Caldwell and the Fiction of Poverty: The Flesh and the Spirit, by Sylvia Jenkins Cook. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991. xiv, 301 pp. $37.50.

IS AN ERSKINE CALDWELL REVIVAL UPON US AT LAST? If, after being gross-

ly undervalued for decades, Caldwell's literary stock appears ready to rise again, no small part of the credit should go to Sylvia Jenkins Cook, who over the last fifteen years has published some of the most intelligent, illuminating work yet written on Caldwell. Cook's ambitious new study, the first book on Caldwell to appear in the wake of the author's death in 1987, and the first genuinely comprehensive overview of Caldwell's entire career, revisits and extends many of the central insights of her earlier work. *Erskine Caldwell and the Fiction of Poverty* will undoubtedly be the starting point for future scholarship on a much-neglected writer for whom Cook justly seeks canonical status.

Why has Caldwell, long held in high esteem abroad, proven such a thorn in the side of our canon-makers, "an anomalous and peripheral figure" in American, and Southern, letters? (p. 1). Cook contends that beneath the apparent simplicity of Caldwell's hard-boiled style and homely subject matter lies an irreconcilable and all but impenetrable doubleness of vision, a radical ambivalence which actively frustrates the "conventional terms of assessment" and "coherent schemes of interpretation" American critics have traditionally insisted on bringing to Caldwell's work (p. 2). This ambivalence, Cook correctly suggests, is Caldwell's most innovative and lasting literary achievement, his true significance as a writer, manifested nowhere more unsettlingly than in a view of human behavior as grounded in what the author himself called "antics and motivations." Cook's explication of this incongruous phrase takes us to the heart of her study, neatly evoking Caldwell's marvelous weirdness. " 'Antics' suggests comic and irrational behavior, 'motivations' the rational and deterministic origins behind people's conduct," and the stubborn conjunction of the two in the Caldwell text means that "[t]here can never be a fixed balance between the explicable and the inexplicable, only a constantly shifting emphasis among different kinds of causality and the possibility of no causality at all" (p. 116). The antics of Caldwell's people lead them toward Rabelaisian farce, their motivations toward Dreiserian tragedy, and this is why the reader who comes to Caldwell seeking diversion, a good backwoods page-turner, tends to experience something much more like vertigo, in which the clash of gothic grotesquerie and naturalistic case history, fatalism and reformism, depravity and deprivation, creates a never-to-be-resolved, immensely *productive* dissonance.

No one has explored this dissonance more thoughtfully and in more detail than Cook. It brings out the best in her as a critic. It is the or-

ganizing principle behind her two solid chapters on Caldwell's ten-novel "cyclorama" of the modern South, it informs her explications of numerous other Caldwell stories and novels, and its strikes me as the real focus of her entire study. My one quibble with her treatment of the subject is actually stylistic, though its implications become substantive. Writing about an obstinately ambivalent world view without condescending to it or misunderstanding it altogether is no mean feat, and Cook pulls it off elegantly, striking an almost neoclassical balance at times between the contradictory elements of the Caldwell vision:

> He seemed by turns prophet and profiteer, scourger and exploiter, fabulist and documenter, fatalist and reformer. His style appears simple, spontaneous, and ingenuous in a way that perhaps only a careful craftsman could contrive. (p. 1)

> He exposed the depravity of poor people's lives with the venom of a naturalist and then held them up to moral irony and incongruous humor. . . . He portrayed individuals as variously irrational, foolish, and vicious, but he attacked fiercely a social system that exposed them to hunger, disease, and persecution. He envisioned an absurd world, but always insisted that not all of its cruel manifestations were beyond cure. (p. 5)

> [I]t was exactly in th[e] fusion of the incorrigible and inexplicable with the socially determined and remediable in his characters that Caldwell's interest and originality resided. (p. 100)

> One of Caldwell's great achievements in the comic depiction of poor people is his balancing of indignation at their imposed predicament with bemused exposure of their flawed natures . . . (p. 159)

All very true, but I wonder whether, in the long run, the stunning originality and power of Caldwell are best captured by such delicate equipoise as offered here (and, to be fair, as offered by yours truly in more than one sentence above)—or whether the key to Caldwell's sensibility resides instead in a glorious excess of vision that comes close to upsetting balances than to establishing them. Balance, in fact, may turn out to be one of those conventional terms of assessment that Cook says should not be brought to Caldwell, who practiced what we might call *over*determinism, audaciously providing contradictory explanations for everything and everybody, outfitting his characters with antics and motivations, and yoking these contrarieties together by violence when either would have sufficed alone. Throughout his major work, he insisted on giving his readers more than they bargained for.

Consider, as a case in point, the most perfectly realized single moment in the Caldwell *oeuvre*, the famous scene from *God's Little Acre* in which a frenzied Will Thompson tears the clothes from Griselda Walden's body, reducing each garment to individual fibers of lint before carrying Griselda off to the bedroom. On the one hand, the psychosexual antics of the characters have more than adequately prepared us for this scene. Will is a Caldwellian *real* man, harboring an erotic power of almost mystical proportions, and, as everyone in the novel as long recognized, Griselda is the real woman destined to awaken the libidinal god/beast in him. As another real man from Southern literature might put it, they've had this date from the beginning. On the other hand, the sociological context of the scene motivates it just as credibly. Will, a native son of the Piedmont whose deep and abiding love for the cotton mills and their culture leaves him particularly susceptible to exploitation by the mill owners, is driven to rhapsody and rage by the sight of what is quite literally the fabric of his life adorning Griselda's body. (From this perspective, of course, the sexual consummation which follows is but anticlimax.)

Rather than a balance of opposing motives, then, or even ambiguity of motive, isn't is a sheer excess of motive that propels this scene? A Will Thompson born to perform this wild display meets a Will Thompson inexorably driven toward it: a perfectly plausible explanation sits alongside, or directly atop, another equally plausible one, throwing the entire scene off kilter—but in a way that drastically increases its impact and makes it instantly memorable. This is Caldwell in peak form, the same Caldwell who gave us *Tobacco Road*, *Journeyman*, *Trouble in July*, and the superb short stories of the 1920s and 1930s; and if Cook is right, as I think she is, to claim that the late fiction seems "dissipated" in comparison (p. 221), moving from "humorless sexual psychodramas" in the 1950s (p. 193) to sociologically inflected treatments of racial themes in the 1960s—antics or motivations—it may be less that a precarious equilibrium has been upset than that a precious supplement has been removed, leaving the late works disappointingly scrutable, sufficient, *canny*. If my hunch here is correct, then we all need to search for better ways to write about Caldwell, ways to honor his splendid superfluities of style and characterization without subjecting them, even implicitly, to the constraining cult of symmetry and balance we have inherited from the New Criticism and other formalisms.

My differences of opinion with Cook over the intricacies of the Caldwell vision do not seriously detract from my general admiration of her book. Not the least of its many merits is its comprehensiveness. To explore some two dozen novels, seven story collections, ten books of nonfiction and the history of Caldwell's critical reception both at home and abroad, all in the space of 285 pages, is a substantial achievement—how many readers are familiar with even a dozen of these books?—and Cook also alludes generously throughout her study to Caldwell's three memoirs. If this wide focus results in the occasional perfunctory synopsis of plot, character, and theme, so be it; for it not only allows Cook to give serious consideration to Caldwell's many minor works (which she does without making inflated claim about their value), but it also leads her to important insights into the better-known fiction of the 1930s. For example, her analyses of apprentice novels like *The Bastard* and *Poor Fool* (pp. 18-30) reveal the characteristic fictional strategies of the mature Caldwell to be the products of years of careful and conscious experimentation, rather than natural and largely unconscious habits of style. Moreover, her chapter on the nonfiction suggests that throughout his career Caldwell applied different stylistic criteria to his journalism and to his fiction; and her careful attention to continuities between the cycloramic and noncycloramic novels supports her contention that the whole concept of the cyclorama was at best rather hazily defined (p. 104).

Cook also deserves credit for taking seriously the vexed relationship between the spiritual and the erotic that figures so crucially in the early novels of the cyclorama, for emphasizing the importance of Caldwell's exposure to the literary avant-garde and the little magazines of the 1920s and 1930s during his apprenticeship (pp. 39-46), and for demonstrating, throughout her study, just how vitally Caldwell's most effective, influential work depends on a spirit of political and ideological engagement, on "ongoing dialogue between his fabrications and social reality" (p. 222). She explicitly accounts for the value of Caldwell's Southern settings and materials (p. 103), and, ironically drawing on the work of French critics like Sartre and Maurice Coindreau, she makes a strong case for the quintessential *Americanness* of Caldwell (pp. 273-277). The figure who emerges from this study is much more formidable—and more canonical—than we knew.

In closing, I should confess that I find Cook's title a little misleading. In fact, I think it sells her short. While I would certainly agree that

a "central concern with poverty in all its material, moral, social, and spiritual manifestations" is one of Caldwell's most important contributions to our literature, and moreover that "[n]o other American writer has made this subject so much his or her province, nor explored so many dimensions of it" (p. 280), these ostensible thesis statements come very late in Cook's study. Nor do they obscure the fact that *Erskine Caldwell and the Fiction of Poverty* contains one chapter that is not about Caldwell's fiction, another chapter (on Caldwell criticism) that is not primarily about it, and a number of individual analyses that don't center on the issue of poverty. Every chapter in the book, however, makes perfect sense as an exploration, in some form or another, of the "antics and motivations" issue, which I have already suggested is Cook's true theme. Come to think of it, "Antics and Motivations" wouldn't have made a bad title for this book. Nor, for that matter, would an old warhorse like "The Achievement of Erskine Caldwell," which would do justice to the ambition of this study and give the reader a clear sense of its scope. For if *Erskine Caldwell and the Fiction of Poverty* ventures beyond the territory mapped out by its title into even further, and sometimes stranger, reaches of the Caldwell imagination, this is actually one of its principal rewards.

University of Mississippi JAY WATSON

God Ordained This War: Sermons on the Sectional Crisis, 1830-1865, by David B. Chesebrough. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991. 360 pp. $29.95; *The Arrogance of Faith: Christianity and Race in America from the Colonial Era to the Twentieth Century*, by Forrest G. Wood. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990. 517 pp. $29.95.

WITH LITTLE DOUBT, RELIGION HAS EXERTED an influence on American life. Negative influences include the anti-intellectualism of Fundamentalism and conservative Evangelicalism which the Scopes trial embodied. Yet, religion has also provided progressive heritage: separation of church and state; the naive, but well-intentioned Social Gospel; and the Civil Rights movement.

It is the last issue, race and religion, which merits continued study. How has religion improved race relations and how has it impeded them?

Has religion not only impeded good race relations, but also actively agitated American race relations? Chesebrough's book, with its sermons from the North and South, illustrates that religion has been a progressive force as well as a reactionary one. Wood, on the other hand, contends that Western religion has not simply been reactionary but that its institutions and its belief system are inherently racist.

God Ordained This War is actually a collection of sermons delivered on the question of slavery and the consequent political division. Divided into three sections with a total of nine chapters, the first two sections contain sermons representing Northern and Southern positions, while the third contains "Black Sermons, South and North." Chesebrough prefaces each of the nine chapters with a well-documented introduction which sets the context for the material which follows.

Chesebrough lives up to his profession as a historian. He selected sermons which capture the mood of the various regions of the country and examines these writings in their historical sense, not their sectarian or devotional sense. He works with an aspect of American life—the sermon—which offers insight into the things to which average Americans listened. He is to be commended for the breadth of his entries, which range from the sermons of the revivalistic Charles Finney to those of the Unitarian Theodore Parker. The Southern sermons, which come from a variety of denominations, reflect the cultural uniformity which connects most Southern institutions. Perhaps Chesebrough's chapter "The Lost Cause" best illustrates the role of Southern religion in developing a worldview all its own.

The final section contains a single sermon by the Princeton-trained black minister, Theodore Wright. Wright presented his understanding of the real problem underlying abolitionism: racial prejudice.

Each chapter is prefaced with a study which sets the context for the following sermons. Not only did the author write in a readable style, but he used the best of secondary sources, giving the reader a good survey of other writings. The book's bibliography evidences the author's skill at searching relevant literature, as well. Chesebrough devoted significant effort to creating a list of primary documents which can serve as an excellent starting point for serious, advanced study.

Wood's broader book deals with the relationship of race and Western religion, especially Christianity. His book raises the issue of religion's role in the racial prejudice of Western culture. *The Arrogance of Faith* proposes that Christianity played an active role in the racial views of the Western world. Wood makes a good effort at developing this theme in the book's 384 pages of text. Certainly, Western religion has been dominantly conservative in its social view. It is possible that religion's conservatism stems from the fact that society influences religion more than religion influences society. This thesis is equally disturbing. Wood proposes that religion causes racism. One can propose that the ethics of religion do not cause racism, but they also have little impact on institutional religion.

Why is this distinction so important? It is important because some people criticized racial prejudice and slavery from a religious worldview. Wood never satisfactorily addresses the role of Quakers, Unitarians, and much of mainstream religion in the North in the abolition movement. He treats American religion as a monolithic whole, when it has actually been quite diverse. His criticism of Southern religion and Evangelicalism is more on target. He does the best job of demonstrating the role of religion in promoting a social order replete with a racial caste system.

The book reflects strong research methods, for the most part. Like Chesebrough, Wood uses the best of secondary sources. He frequently comments on the conclusions of the scholars he quotes, creating in places a historiographical study. When commenting on the Bible, Wood uses little documentation from biblical scholarship. For example, he discusses the impact of Pauline writings on Western culture, assuming that Paul wrote all the books assigned to him by tradition. Of course, serious scholarship does not make that claim.

The great strength of the book lies in its provocative character. Wood forces the reader to examine the role of religion in the racial character of the United States. I recommend the readable, yet repetitious book for classroom use, as well as for bibliographical use. Whether Wood's thesis is true remains the judgment of the individual reader.

Baylor University MERRILL HAWKINS, JR.

To Be an American: David Ramsay and the Making of the American Consciousness, by Arthur H. Shaffer. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991. x, 334 pp. $39.95.

DAVID RAMSAY IS BEST KNOWN FOR HIS histories of the American Revolution, the first of which appeared in 1785. But he lived a life as diverse as it was distinguished. A Princeton graduate trained in medicine at the College of Philadelphia, he had an extensive practice in Charleston, championed public health measures, and wrote two treatises on yellow fever. A Revolutionary patriot, he was held by the British for ten months in St. Augustine, served in both the South Carolina legislature and the Continental Congress, and actively worked for Constitutional ratification in 1788. A proponent of economic growth, he invested heavily in canal stock and served as a director of the South Carolina Homespun Company and the Charleston branch of the first Bank of the United States as well as of the Santee Canal Company.

His intellectual interests were equally complex. Born a Presbyterian and active as an adult in the Congregational Church, he was a committed Calvinist. Accordingly he feared the licentiousness let loose by the Revolution he so staunchly supported and looked to community pressures to supplement religiously inspired self-discipline in providing the social control he believed essential to the republic's survival. Not surprisingly, he supported positive government, opposed that debt relief which threatened the security of property and the validity of contracts, and was, in politics, a Federalist.

All this, Arthur Shaffer, a professor of history at the University of Missouri in St. Louis, develops thoroughly. But in a biography, it is the evolution of a single human being that gives life to the subject. Shaffer defines "the story of David Ramsay" not as one "about how he became a critic of the established order but rather about the process through which he was absorbed into that order" (p. 50). At its core is Ramsay's upward mobility from a modest Scots-Irish Pennsylvania farm family to the upper reaches of South Carolina society.

There were two distinct phases in that transformation. The first and easier began in 1774 when the twenty-five-year old physician arrived in the South's chief port. His professional connections with the American medical elite eased his acceptance in a town whose climate and frequent epidemics made expert medical attention exceptionally

valuable. His active role in the Independent (Congregational) Church paved the way for his marriage in 1775 to an heiress whose death a year later enabled him to meet the property qualification of ten thousand pounds (S.C.) required for election to the privy council. But it was the upheavals of the Revolution that offered so wide a scope to this young man. In electoral contests for municipal posts and service in state and federal legislatures, Ramsay consistently ran ahead of all other candidates. Neither his imprisonment nor his subsequent exile in familiar Philadelphia dampened the satisfactions of those rebellious years. His return to Charleston with his second wife in 1783 seemed only to enhance his success, for he rapidly rebuilt his medical practice and continued his political career.

But already the second and more problematic phase of Ramsay's transformation was under way. In 1779, an ardent opponent of the slave trade and an enthusiastic proponent of arming slaves to fight the British, Ramsay had concluded by 1783 that the struggle to end the trade was Quixotic. He had, in short, begun the characteristic process by which, in normal circumstances, Northern immigrants became Carolinians. In the next five years he surrendered his early beliefs that "all mankind . . . [was] originally the same," that it was social conditions that made white frontiersmen as "savage" as the Cherokees, and that the conditions of slavery had a similar effect on slaves (p. 167). In sum, his early belief that "the low state of blacks" was a function of slavery and not of inherent inferiority gave way by 1788 to an assertion that there was "a physical difference in the constitution of these varieties of human species," that "Providence intended" South Carolina for black slavery, and that "Negroes who have been born and bred in habits of slavery, are . . . well satisfied with their condition" (p. 177).

Shaffer, however, fails to elaborate the dynamics of this about-face, which he chronicles in great detail. He rejects as causes both Ramsay's third marriage, which linked him to the wealthy and powerful Laurens family in 1787, and his resounding defeat in the 1788 Congressional elections. Since both events came toward the end of the shift, this conclusion is logical. But in failing to explore the psychological pressures that might explain the doctor's transition, the author leaves rather too much to the reader. Can it best be explained by Ramsay's realization that his youthful aspirations could not be fulfilled after the unique opportunities of the Revolutionary years had vanished? Or was he, a man approaching forty, damaged and disillusioned by his own failures,

beginning with the difficulties of publishing his histories in huge editions which did not sell? Or was it his impatience with the declining significance of the Continental Congress, which, in the year that he chaired it, could do no business because only seven states sent delegates? Or was it caused by the deaths of his first two wives, each after a single year of marriage, and his unsatisfied yearning for the stability of home and family? Or was it that his explicit defense of Northern interests specifically protected in the Constitution, in addition to his implicit critique of slavery signaled that he was still inherently an outsider in Charleston? All this bears on when, how, and how thoroughly he was absorbed into the established order.

Shaffer gives us as many of the particulars of Ramsay's life as diligent research is likely to extract from the sources. He provides extensive data about Ramsay's social circles, biographical sketches of his associates, and summaries of the events in which Ramsay participated. But he does less well in integrating this information into a narrative that, with all its gaps and contradictions, would better bring Ramsay to life as a human being. In what was probably a wise decision to shun psychobiography, Shaffer also bypassed the alternative ways that would have allowed him to develop the personality of the man with whom, at present, he is probably better acquainted than anyone else.

College of Charleston JANE H. PEASE

Lincoln, the South and Slavery: The Political Dimension, by Robert W. Johannsen. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991. xiii, 128 pp. $19.95.

"I HATED LINCOLN," MARY MCCARTHY recalled in her autobiography *How I Grew* (1987), commenting on the rebellious nature of her adolescent intellectual awakening. Lincoln imagery suffused the civic pageantry in McCarthy's 1920s middle-class Seattle upbringing and she equated Lincoln with everything boorish and bogus in American society. Of course, it was not the historical Lincoln but the bourgeois canonization of Lincoln that McCarthy scorned (she would later find sympathetic elements in Lincoln's melancholy persona). But McCarthy's rebellion against

"Lincoln applesauce" underscored the degree to which Lincoln's "greatness" had become synonymous with national "greatness," and the manner in which both maintained a daunting presence in the land.

With quiet authority, the historian Robert W. Johannsen also confronts the canonized Lincoln. The leading authority on Lincoln's principal political rival, Stephen A. Douglas, Johannsen during his distinguished career constantly faced the meaning of Lincoln's greatness and grappled with its ideological demands. In these essays, all but one of which were originally delivered as the Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History at Louisiana State University, Johannsen raises a corner of Lincoln's shroud of greatness and skillfully reveals the highly partisan character of Lincoln's battles with Douglas in the period 1854 to 1860.

Johannsen places Lincoln's comments on the South and slavery in their political context. "The precise contours" of Lincoln's arguments, writes Johannsen, "were influenced as much by his reading of the political exigencies and by his concern for his own and his party's interests, as they were by his moral convictions." "Indeed," the author continues, "the two forces—morality and politics—merged, for Lincoln ultimately argued that the moral character of the republic depended upon the political success of the Republican party and specifically upon his own election to office" (p. 7).

Before 1860 Lincoln was not as successful in winning election to office as he wished. A faithful Whig, Lincoln served four consecutive terms in the Illinois legislature (1834-41) and one term in the United State Congress (1847-49). But he lost his bid for reelection to Congress in 1848 and, although he campaigned hard and effectively for the victorious Whig presidential candidate Zachary Taylor, Lincoln did not receive the diplomatic reward he believed he deserved. He then retired from active political life and devoted himself to his growing law practice with William Herndon in Springfield.

The political maelstrom generated by Stephen Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 revived Lincoln's political energies although (until 1860) his efforts to win higher elective office continued to fail: he lost campaigns for the United States Senate in 1855 and, more famously, in 1858. Nevertheless, Lincoln's political senses remained sharp and alert. He sensed vulnerability in Douglas and he pressed his attack on

the "Little Giant" ruthlessly and even unfairly. Johannsen's close reading of the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858 is striking precisely because so much of what Lincoln had to say has been so frequently presented out of context.

By 1858, Douglas had broken with President James Buchanan and opposed the proslavery Lecompton constitution in Kansas. Douglas's break with Buchanan moved him closer to the freesoil Democrats, many of whom had moved into the new Republican party. Lincoln had been slow to join the Republican party but once in the new organization he sought a leadership role. As Douglas moved toward conservative antislavery ground (threatening to pull Democrats turned Republican in his direction), Lincoln defined Republican principles in more radical antislavery terms. For the first time, in his famous "House Divided" speech (1858), Lincoln embraced the antislavery movement as a moral crusade. Johannsen argues that this stance represented Lincoln's best chance to erect a party barrier between himself as the leader of Illinois Republicans and Douglas as an increasingly antislavery Illinois Democrat. Whenever pressed, however, Lincoln retreated from radical antislavery principle into ambiguity and vagueness. Lincoln's equivocations served him well in the Republican party and in the North. Similarly, his inactivity and silence during the 1860 presidential contest proved to be an effective tactic for the candidate and the party.

In much of the South, however, these tactics generated mounting alarm. "As Southerners became familiar with Lincoln's arguments," writes Johannsen, "they noted with some concern the ambiguities of his public statements" (pp. 66-67). Lincoln spoke of slavery as a moral evil but he repeatedly insisted that the national government could not touch slavery in existing states. Lincoln rooted his antislavery faith in the self-evident truths enunciated in the Declaration of Independence but he repeatedly insisted that he opposed efforts to make blacks politically and socially equal to whites. He proclaimed his intention to place slavery on the road to ultimate extinction but he insisted that he was no abolitionist and that "ultimate extinction" might be a very long way off. Lincoln's ambiguity and his silence in the face of Southern pleas for assurances about the future of slavery heightened the sense of crisis in the South once Lincoln's election was confirmed. Lincoln as president-elect remained silent and, in private, continued to depict secession as

"'artificial'." As late as two weeks after the creation of the Confederate States of America Lincoln remarked privately, "'Let it alone and it will go down of itself'" (p. 121).

Although Johannsen clearly finds Lincoln's silence ominous in the midst of sectional crisis, he does not argue that a more vocal and less equivocal president-elect might have averted disunion and war. "The point of no return," writes Johannsen, "had long since been passed" (p. 124). Yet, if disunion could not be avoided it could be minimized and here Lincoln and his advisors deserve more credit than Johannsen gives them. Behind the veil of public silence emerged Lincoln's Border State strategy. Not only did Lincoln's equivocations offer vital assurances to Conditional Unionists, but they also expressed an important distinction between his moral vision for the nation (a vision he broadly shared with antislavery reformers) and the political means by which he could advance that vision. In the political arena, Lincoln repeatedly insisted that he was not radical. He did promise that Republicans, once victorious, would put slavery on the road to ultimate extinction. But he refused to predict when, or by what political means slavery would end.

Johannsen successfully looks beyond the canonized Lincoln. In subtle ways, however, Lincoln's stature as a political figure capable of confronting crisis and prevailing through civil war is enhanced.

University of Missouri, St. Louis LOUIS S. GERTEIS

The Edge of the South: Life in Nineteenth-Century Virginia, edited by Edward L. Ayers and John C. Willis. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991. x, 256 pp. $14.95 paperback.

MOST OF THE ESSAYS IN THIS COLLECTION began "modestly" as master's theses in the history department of the University of Virginia. Since that department and University are both distinguished in the field of Southern studies, the appearance of the collection invites reflection on current practice in the education of Southern historians. As a product

of that practice, the volume is far more revealing—and significant—than is the sum of its findings about the history of Virginia or of the South.

The volume reflects the current dominance of social history in Southern as well as American historiography, and the persisting interest in politics. Almost all of the contributions concern themselves with one or another aspect of gender, race, or class in Virginia history; and they do so in times and places sufficiently restricted to give their findings the specificity of case studies. The volume reflects too the emphasis graduate seminars place on archival research, primary sources, empirical grounding of interpretive generalizations, and exhaustive documentation. Less positively, it also reflects the priority academic historians give the presentation of data over the aesthetics of narration. The body of the collection is a series of solid, informative items that modestly illuminate details of the social and political history of nineteenth-century Virginia, but do not have the revisionist significance for Southern history the editor, Edward L. Ayers, claims for them.

The reasons for the limited significance are not specific to the items themselves but generic to the education of Southern—and other—historians. Indeed, the items are generally successful in their own terms. They do in fact show, as Ayers suggests in the Introduction and repeats in the Conclusion, that the localized experience of Virginians confutes the idea that the history of the South can be "strung along some [monolithic] central theme." But in the wake of the "new" social history, does anyone need reminding of that? The problem is not that the items in the collection fail on their own terms; it is that those terms—which, alas, are those of traditional historical scholarship—are themselves problematical.

All of the items rest uncritically on the kinds of objectivist assumptions that Peter Novick exploded in *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (1988). That fact in turn mirrors an absence of systematic theoretical concerns and epistemological self-consciousness, an absence that is not only revealing in itself but also compromises the low-level methodological and interpretive matters some of the contributors remark on. In this and other ways the essays perpetuate traditional forms of historiography that compromise the appeal of historical scholarship among non-historians. At more than one place in the profession, there are hopeful signs that that situation

is changing, and one of the disappointing aspects of the volume under review is that it reflects none of those signs.

History, we often say, reflects the times in which it is written, a truism which suggests that historians are alert to the intellectual and social currents of their day. What, one might ask, are the currents of our own time that have implications for (if not always actual influence upon) historical writing? Reading this collection in light of that question suggests that graduate students in history encounter a range of intellectual experiences that is distressingly narrow. "Presentist" influences manifest themselves in the volume almost exclusively in terms of interest in matters of gender and race, and to a much less extent, of class. Southern historical writing, these essays suggest, is now thoroughly cleansed of traditional forms of sexism and racism, and sufficiently aware of the masses and wary of elites to pass the most demanding test of political correctness. Virginia slaves, we learn by way of illustration from John C. Willis, were no less concerned with matters of honor than were the white Southerners Bertram Wyatt-Brown depicted in *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (1982).

That is of course to be applauded. But are these the only intellectual or social currents historians might draw on to expand their understanding of the South? Many of the theoretical formulations that lie behind the social history in the collection originated with Fernand Braudel and the school of historians in France associated with the journal *Annales: Economies, sociétés, civilisations*. Yet one searches in vain for acknowledgement of that debt or for references to the *Annalistes*. Just as tellingly, the collection is written as if Marx, Freud, Saussure, Gadamer, Derrida, and other seminal thinkers never lived or thought; as if neo-Marxists (including E. P. Thompson), post-Freudians (including Erik Erikson), culturalists such as Clifford Geertz, students of narrative like Hayden White, and bearers of such subversive viruses as post-structuralism, deconstruction, and post-modernism have nothing to say to historians. In more traditional terms, scholars looking for the kinds of quantitative rigor or hypothesis-testing expected of contributors to *Social Science History* or the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* will find the collection equally lacking, as will those who think the ethnocultural studies of political behavior are useful for historians. A partial exception to this overall picture is the use Melinda S. Buza makes of feminist thought.

To note these absences is not to suggest that any one or all of them represents the definitive word in historical approach or methodology. It is to suggest instead that somewhere among them each of the authors in the collection might have found something to strengthen his or her arguments or otherwise enhance the significance of his or her findings. The most challenging interpretation in the collection, to illustrate, is Mary B. Schweiger's hypothesis that the disfranchisement of black and poor white voters at the turn of the twentieth century was due not to racism or Democratic party self-interest but to the problem of voter apathy. That is a genuinely arresting hypothesis, and one would like to see the best case possible made for it. Unfortunately, Schweiger's effort to confirm it is anecdotal, and until it is tested systematically, J. Morgan Kousser's alternative explanation remains more persuasive.

University of Hawaii I. A. NEWBY

The South as a Conscious Minority, 1789-1861: A Study in Political Thought, by Jesse T. Carpenter. Introduction by John McCardell (*Southern Classics Series*). Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990. xxii, 315 pp. $29.95.

STUDENTS OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH OWE the University of South Carolina Press a great debt for the publication of its new *Southern Classics Series*. The series is designed to include a number of distinguished scholarly works about the South that have been out of print. By any standard, Jesse T. Carpenter's *The South as a Conscious Minority* is certainly one of those works.

Originally a Harvard Ph.D. dissertation in 1930, Carpenter's book was first published in an age when the line between the disciplines of history and political science were less rigid than they have become. Carpenter set out to examine how the South's "consciousness of a minority position" within the United States "crystallized Southern opinion and led to the development of a minority philosophy" and the search for "effective minority control" (p. 4).

After a brief introduction in chapter one, the second chapter contains a concise summary of "the South as Section" worthy of Frederick Jackson Turner and Ulrich B. Phillips. Carpenter's treatment of "the South as Minority" stretches back to the ratification of the Constitution, as if anticipating John R. Alden's later work on the "first South." The heart of the book, chapters three through six, traces the development of the South's strict constructionist views, presents John C. Calhoun's concurrent majority as a last-ditch effort to preserve the union, and culminates in the theory of secession. A final chapter examines the Confederate experience as the transformation of a minority philosophy into constitutional law.

Students who expect Carpenter to be a contemporary scholar will be disappointed, for his work exhibits both the weaknesses and strengths of its own time and genre. It is a straightforward history of the political theory of the Southern white elite, with no treatment of dissenting opinions. The author does not deal with the major historiographical issues of that era, such as the debate over the "irrepressible" nature of the Civil War. But the book's strengths are much more obvious than its weaknesses. Carpenter assiduously combed the printed essays, debates and letters of the antebellum period. His quotations from the documents are surprisingly fresh in an era in which we are embarrassed by the riches of vast manuscript collections. And, as John McCardell points out in his splendid introduction, subsequent studies "have served to broaden but not really to overturn or contradict Carpenter's judgments" (p. xvi). McCardell succinctly places Carpenter in his historical framework.

For students who have never read Carpenter or older scholars who have not read him recently, this new edition will prove a treat. The growing list of books in the *Southern Classics Series* is equally enticing.

Furman University A. V. HUFF, JR.